Mobilizing Collaborative Networks for a Transformative Food Politics: A Case Study of Provincial Food Networks in Canada

by

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In this dissertation I focus on the diversity of alternative food initiatives (AFIs) that have emerged amidst concerns about the corporate-led industrial food system. While there have been significant successes, critics suggest that many AFIs are an inadequate response to the complex problems within the food system, and further, are complicit in propagating neoliberal ideals and facilitating the retrenchment of the state. While these critics identify important challenges, they tend to consider place-based AFIs as operating independently on particular projects, with specific claims, or in isolated sectors of the food system. There has been little documentation or analysis situating AFIs within a broader community of practice. To fill this gap, my research builds on the existing literature to investigate the increasing collaborations among AFIs in Canada. Using a community-based action approach, I explore the development of provincial food networks in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. I pay particular attention to efforts that foster and maintain these networks by exploring their history, structure and processes of collaboration. My findings reveal that the provincial food networks can be characterized as assemblages constituted by the self-organization of diverse actors through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. Further, I find that AFIs have used networks strategically to contest the rules and institutions of the dominant food system and to develop participatory and democratic practices that challenge the logics of neoliberalism. Based on the results from this research, I argue that besides developing viable place-based
alternatives to the dominant food system, AFI s are also involved in prefigurative ways of being - establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations - in the belly of the existing (food) system.
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# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Research Context</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Outline</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 2 ALTERNATIVE FOOD INITIATIVES, NETWORKS, AND A TRANSFORMATIVE FOOD POLITICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Food Initiatives in the Age of Neoliberalism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalizing Neoliberal Governance; Creating Neoliberal Subjectivities</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on Isolated Problems Within the Food System</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealizing the “Local” as Inherently Positive</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement Networks</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement Theory</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement Network Theory</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilizing Assemblages</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a Transformative Food Politics</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibilities for Transformation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework for a Transformative Food Politics</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 3 NAVIGATING THE SPACES BETWEEN: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Community-Based Research</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of a Researcher</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating the Spaces Between: Contextualizing My Role in the Research</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Research Process</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies and Research Partners</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Network Survey</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting AFI's for Further Study</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting Background Information</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visits and Interviews</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter/Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Networking Strategies</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Networking Spaces</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Networking Spaces</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalar Networking Strategies</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Contention</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7 Prospects for a Transformative Food Politics</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Elements of a Transformative Food Politics</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Food Initiatives and the Strategic Use of Food Networks</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Subjectivity</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Comprehensive Food System Approach</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive Localization</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and Conclusion</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8 Conclusion</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergence in Diversity</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A Network Survey</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B Interview Guides</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C Popular Education Workshop Descriptions</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D Popular Education Workshop</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

TABLE 3.1: KEY MOMENTS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS ..... 65
TABLE 3.2: REPRESENTATIVES ASSOCIATED WITH EACH PROVINCIAL NETWORK ORGANIZATION AND PROVINCE ..... 68
TABLE 3.3: ALTERNATIVE FOOD INITIATIVES IN EACH PROVINCE PARTICIPATING IN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS ..... 73
TABLE 4.1: SELECTED FOOD RELATED INFORMATION BY PROVINCE ..... 95
TABLE 5.1: RANKING OF ISSUES THAT MOST ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFIED WITH ACROSS THE FOUR NETWORKS ..... 132
TABLE 5.2A: WHAT DECREASES COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY ..... 135
TABLE 5.2B: WHAT INCREASES COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY ..... 136
TABLE 5.3: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO THE TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ..... 137
TABLE 5.4: NETWORK CENTRALIZATION INDEX ..... 140
TABLE 5.5: TOP IN-DEGREE ORGANIZATIONS IN EACH PROVINCE ..... 142
TABLE 6.1: SUMMARY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES AND ROLES OF THE PROVINCIAL NETWORK ORGANIZATIONS ..... 162
TABLE 6.2: EXAMPLES OF PROVINCIAL NETWORK ORGANIZATION-LED INITIATIVES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO NETWORKING STRATEGIES ..... 169
TABLE 7.1: SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTS OF A TRANSFORMATIVE FOOD POLITICS, EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES ..... 222
List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1: CANADIAN FOOD NETWORKS MAP 10
FIGURE 3.1: THE NOVA SCOTIA FOOD GATHERING PHOTO BY CHARLES Z LEVKOE 74
FIGURE 3.2: THE AUTHOR FACILITATING A POPULAR EDUCATION WORKSHOP IN WINNIPEG, MANITOBA PHOTO BY LEANNE DUNNE 77
FIGURE 3.3: PARTICIPANTS IN WORKING GROUPS AT A POPULAR EDUCATION WORKSHOP IN WINNIPEG, MANITOBA PHOTO BY CHARLES Z LEVKOE 78
FIGURE 3.4: POPULAR EDUCATION WORKSHOP CHART 79
FIGURE 3.5: COLOURED PAPER POSTED ON THE WHAT'S HAPPENING CHART PHOTO BY CHARLES Z LEVKOE 79
FIGURE 4.1A: KEY MOMENTS 96
FIGURE 4.1B: KEY MOMENTS: LEGEND 97
FIGURE 4.2: BRITISH COLUMBIA FOOD SECURITY NETWORK LOGO 98
FIGURE 4.3: FOOD MATTERS MANITOBA LOGO 103
FIGURE 4.4: SUSTAIN ONTARIO: THE ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY FOOD AND FARMING LOGO 106
FIGURE 4.5: A GRAPHIC USED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NOVA SCOTIA FOOD SECURITY NETWORK 110
FIGURE 5.1: ORGANIZATIONS HAD REGULAR CONTACT WITH THESE SECTORS IN THE PAST YEAR 138
SCALE AND (DE)CENTRALIZATION 138
FIGURE 5.2: SCALE OF ORGANIZATIONAL WORK 139
FIGURE 5.3: UNDERSTANDING CENTRALITY 140
FIGURE 5.4: FOOD NETWORK SOCIOGRAMS 141
FIGURE 5.4A: BRITISH COLUMBIA FOOD NETWORK SOCIOGRAM 141
FIGURE 5.4B: MANITOBA FOOD NETWORK SOCIOGRAM 141
FIGURE 5.4C: ONTARIO FOOD NETWORK SOCIOGRAM 141
FIGURE 5.4D: NOVA SCOTIA FOOD NETWORK SOCIOGRAM 141
FIGURE 5.5: RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION: IS YOUR ORGANIZATION PART OF THE FOOD MOVEMENT? 144
FIGURE 6.1: SUSTAIN ONTARIO WEBSITE (SCREENSHOT) 175
Chapter 1
Introduction

The corporate race to monopolize land, seeds, water and food stocks on the planet is not accidental. It is, in fact, the main issue. That is why food movements around the world are on the rise. There are an endless number of mobilizations worldwide that are quite diverse, yet they all speak about the same thing. Sometimes they don’t even have similar demands, but they are aiming for the same goal. Across the industrial north and global south, local-level networks are becoming stronger as we create new ways to advance alternative food systems and confront the global power of corporations.
~ Paul Nicholson, Basque Farmers’ Union, EHNE International Coordinating Committee, La Via Campasina (quoted in Holt-Giménez 2011: 9-10)

In May 2012, Olivier De Schutter, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food visited Canada to assess the way in which the human right to adequate food is being realized\(^1\). De Schutter visited communities across the country and met with representatives from all levels of government along with key stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples’ representatives, civil society organizations and a wide spectrum of individuals and experts involved in food issues. In March 2013, he presented his findings to the United Nations General Assembly, which stated that despite its great prosperity, Canada has failed to adequately respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food (UNGA 2012). Specifically, he pointed to inadequate levels of social assistance, the need for a living wage, shortsighted agricultural policies, increasing health problems stemming from poor diets, and the particular challenges facing Northern and Indigenous communities. When De Schutter

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\(^1\) The right to adequate food has been recognized as a fundamental human right through multiple international agreements: see for example the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); World Declaration on Nutrition (1992); Code of Conduct on the Human Right to Food (1997). Canada is signatory to these agreements and has recognized the right to food in many domestic agreements (e.g. Canada’s Action Plan for Food Security in 1998) and indirectly (e.g. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982).
stopped in Toronto during his original visit, I had the opportunity to ask him why Canada had been chosen for the historic mission, the first official visit to a country in the global north. He told me that despite the many challenges, he saw immense opportunity in the high level of organization among Canada’s “food movement” to create viable solutions and hold the government to account. While not the answer I expected, I was inspired to hear an individual with such extensive knowledge and experience point to the power of these kinds of efforts as central to his optimism. The quote from Paul Nicholson leading this chapter also suggests that we can no longer ignore the way that food has catalyzed diverse organizations across the globe around issues of justice, equity, the environment, and a host of other concerns. My dissertation builds on these observations to explore the increasing collaborations among food-related organizations through provincial networks in Canada. The objective of this research is to examine the role that networks of alternative food initiatives (AFIs), rather than individual initiatives play in developing resistance to the corporate led industrial food system. Engaging in community-based action research, I pay particular attention to efforts that foster and maintain these networks by exploring their history, structure and processes of collaboration. By providing an analysis of AFIs using a network perspective, my aim is to identify whether networks may be transforming the food system and if so, to explore the particular strategies being mobilized. In this chapter I provide an overview of the research context, my specific research focus and an outline of the dissertation.

The Research Context

The concept of a “food system” has been used to refer to the various processes and infrastructures involved in feeding a population. It is typically described as a chain of
activities that begins with the growing and/or harvesting of food and moves on to include processing, distribution, marketing, wholesaling, retailing, consumption, and eventual the disposal of waste. While this list covers the main components, it portrays the food system as a hierarchical, linear configuration of one-way flows. Further, the word “system” tends to invoke the idea of a closed loop of components forming an integrated whole. This perspective however, fails to capture the dynamic interdependence of the components along with the impact of external elements such as the influence of social, political, economic and environmental factors. Evoking the concept of a “system” demands that we consider its components as more than simply a collection of things. In general, a system refers to the interconnections of elements (either directly or indirectly) for some function or purpose (Meadows 2008: 11). Consequently, some analysts have conceived of the food system not as a chain, but as an interactive, interdependent web of activities and relationships that influence the “how and why and what we eat” (Tansley and Worsley 1995: 1; see also Sumner 2012). In my research, I draw on the web metaphor to describe the complexity of relationships that constitute the food system. My use of this metaphor also highlights the social relations that have constructed the web (through historical and geographic processes) as opposed to accepting it as natural or pre-given. The strands of the food web are maintained through various social norms, ecological limitations, and institutionalized relations of governance (e.g. practices, laws, regulations, policies). It is through struggles surrounding these strands that food becomes politicized. Put simply, the food system is neither fixed nor stable but always in flux. It is a construction of complex configurations and each of its different elements are, in turn, part of other extended configurations.
Studies of the food system provide a lens for understanding some of the most pressing issues facing societies around the globe. Food, for example, can help us understand the ways that people are connected to place and to the world more broadly (Bell and Valentine 1997; Steel 2009; Koc et al. 2012). Existing literature demonstrates that our food system fails to equitably meet people’s needs in even the most basic sense, illustrated in part by increasing rates of hunger (Davis and Tarasuk 1994; Health Canada 2007), and by imbalances in power and material resources (Patel 2007; Roberts 2008). According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO 2012a), about 870 million people globally suffer from hunger and malnutrition, despite the fact that there is more than enough food being produced to feed the world’s population (FAO 2012b). In Canada, food bank use has reached record levels, increasing over 31% since 2008 (FBC 2012). Injustices within the food system are also evident in the difficult and dangerous conditions of farmers and farm workers (Das et al. 2001; NFU 2005; UFCW and AWA 2011), and in the unequal impact of these and other challenges on women (Barndt 1999; 2002; Allen and Sachs 2007; Shiva 2009) and other marginalized groups (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Large-scale monoculture farming, heavy reliance on fossil fuels (used in fertilizers and pesticides as well as transport), and industrial livestock operations have been documented as contributing to water, soil and air pollution, climate change and a loss of biodiversity (McMichael 2007; Weis 2007). According to a recent report, the industrial food system was found to be responsible for between 44-57% of all global greenhouse gas emissions (GRAIN 2011). An “energy dense, nutrient poor” diet (Cordain et al. 2005) has contributed to a global obesity epidemic (World Health Organization 2000) and diet related diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, type-2 diabetes, and nutritional deficiencies, becoming more prevalent than ever (Lang and Rayner 2002). Increasing corporate control
within the food system has left limited space for democratic participation, alienating people from the production and consumption of food (Kneen 1989; McMichael 2000). Further, increasing commodification has encouraged individual decision making through consumer choice and producer coordination, mediated through markets (Friedmann 1993; Albritton 2009). The corporate led industrial food system, then, poses significant challenges to social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democratic governance.

In response to these concerns, alternative food initiatives (AFIs) have been building momentum, with a focus on challenging the corporate led industrial food system by developing viable, place-based solutions (see for example Allen et al. 2003a; Kirbyson 2005; Katz 2006; CCA 2009; Elton 2010; Winne 2010; Wittman et al. 2011; Elton 2013). According to Kevin Morgan (2009), these proliferating activities have become “one of the most important social movements of the early twenty-first century in the global north” (343). Coordinated by individuals and organizations, AFIs cover a wide range of food-related activities, from educating about and growing food to developing formal policy and infrastructure. They include attempts to reconnect farmers and consumers (e.g. community shared agriculture projects and farmers’ markets), preserve agricultural land (e.g. agricultural land reserves, agroecological training and supporting new farmers), revive and protect cultural food practices (e.g. food literacy), increase accessibility to healthy food for marginalized urban consumers (e.g. food hubs and urban agriculture) and to develop new processes and mechanisms that enable the participation of all people in democratic decision making around the food system (e.g. food policy councils and roundtables).

While many AFIs purport to be developing solutions to the corporate led industrial food system, recent studies have raised significant questions around their approach and practice. A
number of critics assert that AFIs have adopted a selective interpretation of the problems within the food system, and that their activities therefore, have been limited in both scale and scope. Some initiatives have assumed that local food will be inherently more socially just and environmentally sustainable, thus conflating scalar strategies with particular outcomes (Hinrichs 2003; Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006). It has also been suggested that initiatives promoting organics as a just and sustainable alternative to conventional food have ignored core problems around production practices, land ownership and the exploitation of labour (Guthman 2004; Allen 2010). As a result of these (and other) interpretations, AFIs have been seen to be an inadequate response to the complex problems within the food system and complicit in propagating neoliberal ideals and facilitating the retrenchment of the state (Allen 1999; Tarasuk 2001; Shreck 2005; Allen and Guthman 2006; Guthman 2008b; 2012; Sharzer 2012). In general, these critiques point to AFIs as engaging in uncritical practices, wherein social relations are assumed to be inevitable and ahistorical and consequently enable the reproduction of inequitable and unjust social relations. In her research on AFIs across the United States, Patricia Allen (2004) argues that despite their inspiring work, AFIs will continue to reside on the margins until they begin to address the long-term, structural challenges within the food system.

These critics identify important challenges that limit the ability of food activists to have a meaningful impact on the corporate led industrial food system and on neoliberalism more broadly. However, while most critical researchers would agree that food must be understood as an interconnected system (i.e. a web) as opposed to a linear configuration of one-way flows (Tansey and Worsley 1995), the way that AFIs may also be interconnected has not been thoroughly examined. Much of the existing research tends to consider place-based AFIs as operating independently on particular projects, with specific claims, or in isolated sectors of the food system. To date, there has been little documentation or analysis that has situated AFIs
within a broader community of practice and considered the potential for a transformative politics that may emerge from these interconnections. Furthermore, studies that have examined alternative food networks (AFN) predominantly focus on alternatives to the industrial mode of food supply that attempt to respatialize food through “closer” and more “authentic” relationships between producers and consumers (Renting et al. 2003; Jarosz 2008). These studies have often ignored the broader range of activities taking place within the networks themselves (e.g. community building, ecological preservation, civic engagement, and policy work).

New research has suggested that AFIs are increasingly becoming connected across sectors, scales and geographies through networked communities of food practice (Friedmann 2007; Levkoe et al. 2011). Further, some scholars have suggested that network building among AFIs helps make connections between everyday life and broader social, economic and ecological issues through food (see for example Toronto Food Policy Council 1994; Hassanein 2003; Allen 2004; Wekerle 2004; Stevenson et al. 2008; Holt Gimenez and Shattuck 2011; Wittman et al. 2011; Goodman et al. 2012). Illustrative of these connections is a group of provincial-level networking organizations that have emerged across Canada. These provincial network organizations (PNOs) have an explicit mandate to support the work of AFIs and to foster collaboration. Acting as a broker within the networks and focusing at the provincial level, the PNO have a wider reach and broader perspective than locally based actors. The provincial level is significant for organizing around food issues because under Canadian federalism, the provinces are co-sovereign jurisdictions with legislative control over a number of areas relevant to the food system including health care, agriculture, education, municipal institutions, property and civil rights.
In this dissertation, I empirically document the way that most AFIs are embedded in a particular experience in place and develop grounded knowledge about specific issues in their local communities. Participation in networks provides an opportunity for AFIs to share their experiences with others from different places and with different perspectives. Increased interaction and relationship building provides new opportunities for developing food system solutions. Collaborations across sectors, scales, and geographies offer the potential to work towards longer-term, structural changes necessary fortransforming the food system. However, with these opportunities come new challenges since networks bring together people and ideas with contradictory perspectives, creating tensions that must be negotiated. Failing to understand the structure, role and strategic use of networks by AFIs produces an incomplete picture of the struggles surrounding the food system. Further, this omission may unintentionally normalize dominant practices, reinforcing myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for future action.

The Research

In an effort to better understand the possibilities and limitations of food system transformation, my research investigates the increasing collaborations among AFIs occurring through food networks in Canada. I pay particular attention to the attempts to foster and maintain these networks by exploring the history, structure and processes of collaboration. Better understanding these network forms and functions can help to elucidate new challenges among the efforts to mobilize AFIs but also opens new opportunities for transformative action. Unlike studies that explore AFIs working in isolation with a singular perspective on what an alternative food system should be, I examine the ways AFIs are working together towards the broad vision of a healthy, ecological and just food system. By providing an analysis of the collaboration
among AFIs, my research explores the potential of networks to improve the particular strategies being mobilized and transform the food system. In this dissertation, I argue that while AFIs are embedded in a neoliberal context, they serve as prefigurative experiments establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations.

I use a community-based, participatory research methodology involving case studies of four provincial food networks in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. These four provinces were chosen to represent a range of settings across Canada and also varying degrees of food network maturity. Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of the four case study provinces as well as a brief description of the PNOs and AFIs that participated in the research (I describe the research participants in greater detail in Chapter 3). As an active part of the networks, my aim has also been to support and strengthen the activities of the food networks by providing useful information about how they work and opportunities for critical reflection on their practices.
Like a rhizome, Canada's food networks are heterogeneous, decentralized, and deeply interconnected. The networks demonstrate collaboration while encouraging diverse interrelated strategies that push the logics of system transformation. The map highlights some of these food initiatives and the provincial organizations that are working to create connections across issues, sectors, and scales. Together, they are propagating a more just, sustainable, and democratic food system.
Chapter Outline

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2 I develop a theoretical framework to analyze AFIs along with the structures and functions of provincial food networks in Canada. I begin with an overview of the scholarly literature to elaborate the critiques of AFIs, particularly around the adoption of localized self-provisioning models that focus on individual and community-level solutions, ignoring the interconnected nature of problems within the food system and reifying the local scale and specificity of food system issues and problems. While the critiques elucidate important challenges, existing research has not adequately examined the way that AFIs are already working in collaboration or how they can serve different functions, learn and change over time, and become an entry point towards broader politicization. To explore collaborative efforts among AFIs, I turn to social movement and network theories to consider the way that food initiatives are mobilizing across sectors, scales and geographies. I draw on the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool to describe the way that networks can be characterized as interminable and constituted by the self-organization of diverse actors through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. My objective of using this concept is to develop a richer understanding of social movement networks, explore new forms of mobilization and investigate effective tactics and strategies for food system transformation. In the final section of Chapter 2, I build on the critiques of AFIs (which focus on the kinds of politics and activities AFIs should avoid) and assemblages (as an analytical tool) to explore possible processes and strategies for food system change. I propose a description of a transformative food politics that attempts to address the root causes of challenges within the corporate led industrial food system, rather than just the symptoms.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research process and my role as an engaged researcher working in collaboration with the provincial food networks. I begin by describing my
understanding of community-based research (CBR), along with the benefits and challenges associated with its practice. I also interrogate the complex role of the researcher and adopt the concept of the *spaces between* (Dwyer and Buckle 2009) as a way to navigate the discursive and material spaces where identities, ideals and professional obligations intersect. I suggest that approaching research through a navigation of these different spaces shifts positionality from a fixed location to embodying the fluid spaces of our daily lives, including the places we inhabit, our multiple relationships and subject formations. Integrating my experiences as part of different and often overlapping networks was an integral part of this research process. I designed the research to triangulate data using a number of primary methods: a network survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews, background materials, site visits, and popular education workshops. I explain my research as a community-based action project, and detail the way partnerships were developed and collaboration maintained, and how the data was collected and used. To tell this story, I draw out the tensions inherent in my role as a researcher working within the networks. I argue that when done well, CBR can increase the quality and validity of the research results as well as contribute to progressive social change efforts.

In North America, there has been an increasing amount of literature focusing on AFIs; however, there has been little study of the interrelationships among them. While this may imply that there has been limited collaborative mobilization around food issues, *Chapter 4* demonstrates this is not the case. In this chapter I draw on in-depth interviews and background materials to explore the historical development of collaborative efforts focusing on broad-based food issues in Canada since the late 1970s. I introduce the four case study provinces, with a focus on the PNOs in each one - the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN), Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain Ontario), and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN). Through a description of the
four provincial case studies and cross-provincial network development, I demonstrate that there has indeed been a history of food-related collaboration in Canada. Contrary to assumptions that these AFIs act in isolation, I show that they are part of ongoing mobilizations through robust provincial networks. Further, I highlight the way the provincial networks have been constituted by (historically and geographically) contextualized and overlapping networks of actors and spaces (i.e. assemblages).

Turning to the current forms of provincial food organizing, *Chapter 5* investigates the structure and constitution of the four case study networks, identifying the kinds of relationships and the nature of collaborations among network participants. This chapter draws on the network survey, the in-depth interviews and popular education workshops to demonstrate that while the networks exhibit some elements of a collective identity, network AFIs have diverse objectives, approaches and tactics that do not always align into a coherent political program. Further, while all four provincial networks have a high level of interconnectivity, they are extremely decentralized, with no actors who completely dominate the network. Despite the low levels of centrality, findings reveal that the PNOs hold more central positions in each of the provincial networks. Drawing on the analytic of assemblages, I empirically document that the provincial food networks display different structures and forms of mobilization than previous social movement networks described in the literature. In the final discussion, I explore the implications this may have for understanding and analyzing the provincial food networks.

In *Chapter 6*, I investigate the strategic positioning of the PNOs in the provincial food networks as “weavers” (Stevenson et al. 2008), and document their efforts to support diverse AFIs to interact – and act collaboratively – around food system issues. This approach responds to the argument that some applications of network analysis have neglected the role that actors play
influencing the networks. I empirically demonstrate that particular networking strategies are developed by the PNOs, while also being heavily influenced by the AFIs and the context in which they are embedded. I begin by exploring the scholarly literature that points to the roles organizations have played in sustaining social movements and the ways networking strategies have been used to develop various approaches and spaces as a meeting place constructed through processes of interaction. Following from this, I draw on the provincial network survey, the interviews, site visits, and background information to examine the administrative structures and roles of the PNOs as well as the kinds of efforts being used to foster connections and sustain the networks. I describe the way that the PNOs have attempted to establish a series of networking strategies to bring together AFIs across sectors, scales and geographies. I identify three of the most common strategies across the case study provinces: 1) the provision of physical spaces that involve direct contact in particular places where AFIs meet face-to-face; 2) the provision of virtual spaces where connections are mediated through different technologies; and, 3) scalar strategies where AFIs use different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects to organize around and impact provincial level policy. By analyzing the development of the different networking strategies across the four provincial networks, we can better understand how the PNOs are positioned within the networks to foster and support collaboration. I conclude by pointing to some key areas of contention that arise within these spaces, and argue that addressing tensions must be a preemptive focus of the PNO’s efforts in order to sustain the network’s activity.

While the earlier chapters explain how the provincial networks were developed, structured, fostered and sustained, in Chapter 7 I investigate how they have been used to facilitate a transformative food politics by highlighting examples of AFIs that are actively collaborating with others to further their objectives and goals. I return to the concept of a
transformative food politics (introduced in *Chapter 2*) to describe the kinds of initiatives that attempt to address the root causes of current challenges, rather than just the symptoms. As a framework, I propose three interrelated elements of what a transformative food politics might look like: 1) the transition from individualized market mechanisms to collective subjectivities; 2) an approach that comprehensively considers the multifaceted and interrelated elements, activities and relationships that constitute the food system; and, 3) a politics of reflexive localization that involves both place-based organizing and connections to broader solidarities across localities.

Using these three strategies as a starting point, I investigate the collaborative activities taking place within the case study provinces to highlight where transformative work is already happening and to identify the opportunities and areas for improvement within future collaborations. Based on an analysis of the research findings, I argue that the networks provide a strategic opportunity for AFIs to mobilize and develop transformative orientations, but that these efforts have some significant limitations that must be addressed.

I conclude in *Chapter 8* with a summary of the dissertation’s overall findings and contributions along with some final reflections evolving from my research. I also identify some limitations of the dissertation and directions for future study.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the research context and a general outline of the dissertation. My research focuses on AFIs that aim to challenge the corporate led industrial food system by developing viable, place-based solutions. While critics have identified important challenges among their approaches and practices, they tend to identify AFIs as operating independently on particular projects, with specific claims, or in isolated sectors of the food
system. Despite a wealth of circumstantial evidence of collaborative efforts, there has been little documentation or analysis that has situated AFIs within a broader community of practice and considered the ensuing potential for a transformative food politics. Failing to understand the ways that AFIs are strategically using networks produces an incomplete picture and may unintentionally reinforce myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for future action. My research contributes to these debates through the use of the concept of assemblages and a framework for considering a transformative food politics. My research also contributes to an improved practice among the networks by providing AFIs and PNOs with a better understanding of the context in which they are working and by increasing the connections across sectors, scales and geographies.

An underlying current of my findings is that food networks offer more than strictly an oppositional politics and are involved in efforts that go well beyond strategic instrumental action. Evidence presented in this dissertation suggests that by working collaboratively and critically reflecting on their work, AFIs are involved in prefigurative experiments - establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations - in the belly of the existing (food) system. A central role for AFIs, beyond modeling alternatives, has been to develop and promote a new political imaginary that embodies a transformative orientation. This is no easy task, but, as I illustrate in the pages ahead, it is one that is already well underway.
Chapter 2
Alternative Food Initiatives, Networks, and a Transformative Food Politics

To inoculate ourselves against the dangers of being co-opted into the very food system we have spent a decade criticizing, we need politics. Two instant caveats, though. First, merely talking about the politics of the modern food system isn’t sufficient to prevent the movement’s energy from being dissipated while dealing with the “dignified emergency” of increasing hunger . . . Second, a call to talk about capitalism in the food system isn’t a call for a single totalitarian politics to which all must subscribe. Every US social movement, from abolition to the Tea Party, has drawn on an assortment of sometimes contradictory political positions.

~ Raj Patel, Visiting Scholar at UC Berkeley’s Center for African Studies, Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a fellow at The Institute for Food and Development Policy (quoted in Holt-Giménez 2011: 117)

In a CBC interview about the Occupy movement and other recent social movement activity, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek was asked about his perspective of contemporary forms of social mobilization. In response, Žižek suggested that movement tactics and strategies had changed dramatically in recent years. He emphasized that many of the new movements are not proposing answers to immediate problems, but instead are reimagining the system itself and engaging in a broad conversation about the range of possible solutions (see Bloch 2012). These observations speak directly to the purpose of this dissertation, which aims to study contemporary forms of social mobilization in order to better understand the possibilities for food system transformation.

In recent years there has been a high level of public engagement in food issues, and a rapid increase of alternative food initiatives (AFIs) in both number and scope. Similar to other contemporary social movements that bring together diverse actors and do not propose a concrete set of demands in any singular sense (e.g. global justice, Occupy, autonomous media, etc.), the
food movement has been described by some as a disparate collection of initiatives mobilizing against various aspects of the dominant corporate led industrial food system (Hassanein 2003; Wekerle 2004; Wakefield 2007). There has been much written about these efforts, mostly AFIs operating independently on specific projects (e.g. community gardens, farmers markets, organic and/or fair trade collectives, eco-labeling, etc.). Documentation exists about specific food-related issues and sectors (for example, Mooney and Majka 1999; Guthman 2004; Belasco 2006; McMichael 2006; Desmarais 2008; Eaton 2013), but there has been little consideration of collaborative mobilization among AFIs across sectors, scales and geographies (Wright and Middendorf 2008). Even scholars that make reference to an elusive “food movement” rarely explain what it is, what unites it, and its significance as part of broader food system change. My research aims to fill this gap by exploring the collaborations among AFIs through provincial food networks in Canada. In this dissertation, I pay particular attention to efforts that foster and maintain these networks by exploring the history, structure and processes of collaboration. By providing an analysis of AFIs using a network perspective, I identify some of the strengths and areas for improvement of attempts to transform the food system.

In this chapter, I position my research in the context of a series of scholarly debates in order to develop a theoretical framework that will be used to analyze AFIs along with the structures and functions of provincial food networks in Canada. I begin with an overview of the current literature on AFIs and a discussion of the studies that suggest AFIs have taken a selective, isolated, and uncritical approach in their work. Drawing on a range of literatures, I elaborate on the critiques of AFIs, particularly around the adoption of localized self-provisioning models that focus on individual and community-level solutions, while ignoring the interconnected nature of problems within the food system and reifying the local scale and specificity of food system issues and problems. While these critiques elucidate important
challenges, I argue that viewing AFIs as working independently on isolated aspects of the food system provides an incomplete picture and may unintentionally reinforce myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for future action. For example, some of these perspectives overlook the way that AFIs are already working in collaboration, can serve different functions, learn and change over time, and can become an entry point towards broader politicization.

As a way to consider collaboration efforts among AFIs, I turn to social movement network theories, a collection of overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ideas about the ways social movements form, function, and succeed or fail. I provide a brief discussion of the progression of these theories over the past fifty years and the call from some scholars for new theoretical and practical approaches to understand current forms of network building. Drawing on a series of observations surrounding the changing structures of collaboration, I use the concept of assemblages to consider the way that food initiatives are mobilizing across sectors, scales and geographies. Using this analytical lens draws specific attention to the work involved in bringing actors together, forging connections and sustaining the assemblages amidst internal and external tensions. In the final section of the chapter, I build on the critiques of AFIs, which focus on the kinds of politics, and activities AFIs should avoid, and assemblages as an analytical tool to explore the processes and strategies for transforming the food system. I propose a description of a transformative food politics that attempts to address the root causes of challenges within the corporate led industrial food system rather than just the symptoms, and emphasizes the processes of transformation over specific ideals as a final goal. This chapter introduces a range of scholarly literature in order to contextualize the empirical data that follows.
Alternative Food Initiatives in the Age of Neoliberalism

AFIs have been expanding in number and scope across North America in response to increasing concerns about the ecological, socio-political and economic implications of the corporate led industrial food system (Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009; Elton 2010; Winne 2010; Wittman et al. 2011; Elton 2013). AFIs have been described as self-governed collectives of individuals or groups that originate primarily from within civil society (Allen et al. 2003a). Their objectives range from small reforms within the existing food system, to fundamental transformations that (re)imagine and (re)construct the system from the ground up (Toronto food Policy Council 1994; Shreck 2008; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). I have developed the following interconnected typology to conceptualize the broad scope of AFIs:

• **Social justice initiatives** address power and material equity through physical and economic accessibility to sufficient amounts of food along with the circumstances and conditions of those who produce food. This includes AFIs working for food security and anti-poverty (Levkoe and Wakefield 2011), justice for food workers throughout the food system (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011), and fair/direct trade initiatives (Raynolds 2000; Shreck 2005);

• **Ecological sustainability initiatives** address the connection between human and ecological systems, along with the enduring biodiversity of those systems. This includes AFIs working for agroecological farming practices (Cohn et al. 2006; Gliessman 2007; 2013) and eco-certifications (Friedmann 2007; Higgens et al. 2008);

• **Community development initiatives** address collective empowerment and mutual support surrounding regional capacity to produce and distribute adequate nutritious, safe and

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2 Parts of this section have been adapted from Levkoe 2011a.
culturally acceptable foods. This includes AFIs working on urban agriculture projects (Baker 2004; Levkoe 2006; Wakefield et al. 2007; McClintock 2013), community shared agriculture (Fieldhouse 1996), farmers’ markets (Feagan et al. 2004), food box schemes (Johnston and Baker 2005), food hubs (Levkoe and Wakefield 2011), and food literacy (i.e. skills and information training) (Vidgen and Gallegos 2011); and,

- **Democracy-enhancing initiatives** address process equity through increasing opportunities for public participation in decision-making and system-wide control, such as food policy councils and roundtables (Welsh and MacRae 1998; Wilkins 2005; Schiff 2008; Blay-Palmer 2009), and cooperatives (CCA 2009).

While most AFIs purport to be developing an alternative to the corporate led industrial food system (McMichael 2000; Allen et al. 2003a; Hassanein 2003) and have had localized successes (Feenstra 2002; Allen et al. 2003b; Shreck 2005; Elton 2010; Winne 2010; Wittman et al. 2011; Elton 2013), recent studies have raised important concerns around their approach and practice. In general, critiques of AFIs point to actors engaging in uncritical practices, wherein social relations are assumed to be ahistorical and inevitable and consequently enable the reproduction of inequitable and unjust social relations. From these critical perspectives, the work of AFIs, at best, has been seen to have little impact on making any significant systemic change, and at worst, counterproductive, in that it has ignored the interconnected nature of problems and is complicit in the neoliberalization of the food system. In the remainder of this section, I explain these major critiques of AFIs in three overlapping categories: normalizing neoliberal governance and creating neoliberal subjectivities; a focus on isolated problems within the food system; and, idealizing ideas of “local” as inherently positive.
Normalizing neoliberal governance; creating neoliberal subjectivities

The first category of critiques suggests that some AFIs have been complicit in normalizing neoliberal governance and encouraging neoliberal subjectivities. Neoliberalism can be broadly explained as a political and economic project that emerged in the 1970s in order to consolidate class power by re-orienting state regulations towards supporting the free movement of capital. Described as a theory of political and economic practices, neoliberalism proposes that human well-being is best advanced by entrepreneurial freedom with an institutional framework of strong private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 2005). In practice, neoliberalization has involved the privatization of public resources, the minimization of labour costs, reductions in public expenditures, the dismantling of public programs, re-crafting regulations seen as unfriendly to business, and the liberalization of international commodity and financial markets (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Peck 2004; Harvey 2006).

The rapid retreat of the state from social welfare provisioning and the downloading of responsibility to the private sector have led to an increasing inability of governments to support and safeguard citizens equitably. Beginning in the mid-1990s, non-profit organizations, businesses, and faith-based groups increasingly were left to take over state responsibilities and service provisioning through the development of institutionalized public-private partnerships (Peck and Tickell 2002). This shift resulted in moving responsibility for meeting basic human needs, including food, to the non-profit and private sectors (Poppendieck 1998; Allen 1999). The term “shadow state” has been used to refer to the para-state apparatus comprised of voluntary and non-profit organizations providing a range of goods and services that have attempted to redress inequalities and regulatory gaps (Wolch and Dear 1989). Mitchell (2001) writes, “the general effect of the rise of these shadow state voluntary institutions was to help entrench the
original economic policies of neoliberalism in a hegemonic and recursive process” (167). As a form of governance under advanced liberalism, the shadow state became a new technology of power, legitimating inequality and privatization, and softening the impacts of state retrenchment while protecting the state from losing legitimacy (Wolch 1999; Martin 2004). While non-profit organizations often provide crucial services that aim to improve quality of life or simply make life possible (e.g. food banks and meal programs), critics have argued that their complicity in the facilitation and maintenance of neoliberalism has weakened the sector’s ability to impact its constituents and to work for broader transformation (Ilcan and Basok 2004; Trudeau 2008).

While not all the provincial network organizations (PNO) and AFIs discussed in this dissertation are formally registered as non-profit organizations, they have all evolved and operate within this context.

Prominent voices in the literature have argued that while many AFIs oppose various aspects of neoliberalism, they have been complicit in propagating neoliberal ideals and facilitating the retrenchment of the state (Poppendieck 1998; Allen and Guthman 2006; Allen 2008; Guthman 2008b; Sharzer 2012). The institutionalization of food banks (and emergency food aid more generally) in Canada aptly illustrates this trend. In the late 1970s, Canadians experienced rising inflation and interest rates along with increased unemployment and poverty. As pressures on working people increased, they were met with inadequate responses from federal unemployment insurance and provincial social assistance programs; indeed, many social service programs were cut back in precisely this period (Riches 1986; Davis and Tarasuk 1994). As people struggled to meet their basic needs in a context of rising real-estate rents, shelter expenses frequently took precedence over purchasing food. Recognizing the growing crisis, community groups adopted the model of the food bank as a central location to collect and distribute donated foodstuffs. When the first Canadian food bank was established in 1981, it was intended as a
temporary solution, but by 1985 there were over 75 food banks across the country (Riches 1986), and in 2012 there were almost 2,000 (FBC 2012). The continued growth of food banks as the predominant response to hunger has garnered widespread public support and is consistent with the logic and governance structures of neoliberalism (Warshawsky 2010). Critics have argued that food banks along with other initiatives rooted in a charity model (e.g. some community kitchens and meal programs) may be able to meet immediate needs, but fail to challenge the erosion of state welfare systems that made them necessary in the first place (Poppendieck 1994; Allen 1999; Tarasuk and Eakin 2003). In other words, dealing with the problem of hunger as opposed to the structural inequalities underlying food insecurity fails to address more long-term solutions.

It has been suggested that AFIs that strive to promote and provide alternative food options (e.g. healthy, organic, local, fair trade, etc.) have also been complicit in neoliberal logics. For example, while community food enterprises (e.g. farmer’s markets and community shared agriculture projects) may provide better food options for some people, they have been accused of indirectly maintaining and reproducing social inequality by encouraging individual responsibility and consumer choice for the socially and economically privileged (Tarasuk 2001; Guthman 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2009). The complicity of AFIs in the subjugation of food to the private realm can be illustrated by the idea of “voting with your fork” (Pollan 2006a). The assumption behind this concept is that individual choices around what to eat will result in a trickle-down effect, where those who can afford to make the “correct” choices about their food purchases will eventually benefit everyone (Guthman 2007a). Exploring the social practices behind this approach of consumption-based regulation, Johnston (2008) questions whether there can be a common ground between ideologies of consumerism (rooted in individual, self-interest) and citizenship (rooted in collective social and environmental responsibility). Cautious not to
dismiss the possibility outright, her empirical observations at a Whole-Foods Market in Toronto reveal that claims of “ethical consumerism” manifest primarily in forms of corporate niche marketing targeted at privileged, conscientious consumers, as opposed to addressing social justice or ecological sustainability for the collective good (Johnston 2008).

In this scenario of “voting with your fork,” eating is assumed to be a political end in and of itself. It is also part of a broader trend toward “ethical” or “green” consumption, where regulatory control for the collective good is superseded by individualized consumer choice (Lockie 2009). For example, Julie Guthman (2007b; 2008) writes that fair trade and voluntary food labels actively construct neoliberal subjects through conceding the market as the locus of regulation. This form of consumer-based food politics, argues Guthman (2007a), “has become a progenitor of a neoliberal anti-politics that devolves regulatory responsibility to consumers via their dietary choices” (264). Put simply, encouraging consumers to “know where your food comes from” ignores the historical and structural conditions that have led to contemporary inequalities and ecological exploitation. Without being part of a broader political strategy, this tactic is consistent with a culture of individualism and consumerism.

In summary, the promotion of charity-based and individualized food action has led critics to conclude that some AFI s are complicit in the creation of neoliberal-subjects by uncritically accepting discourses of entrepreneurialism, self-help, self-improvement, and charity models of assistance. These critiques help to elucidate how the commodification of food contributes to a particular form of neoliberal subjectivity – specifically as self-governing individuals active primarily in the private realm. Through the identity of a “consumer subject”, a neoliberal logic is encouraged through everyday behaviour. Thus, despite an intention to embrace progressive politics, by uncritically filling the gaps left by government cutbacks and supporting a culture of
individualized responsibility, AFIs are seen as being complicit in the processes of neoliberalization.

**Focusing on isolated problems within the food system**

A second general category of critiques is that AFIs have focused on isolated issues while ignoring the interconnected nature of problems within the corporate led industrial food system. The perceived siloing of issues by AFIs can be explained by the development of various food-related social movement discourses (Lezberg 1999; Allen 2004). For example, from the perspectives of anti-poverty groups, food insecurity is attributed to insufficient income and inadequate social services (Davis and Tarasuk 1994). This is based on the premise that there is more than enough food to feed the earth’s population, thus identifying hunger as a problem related to unequal distribution of food, insufficient income to purchase enough adequate food, and insufficient access to land to produce food (see Millstone and Lang 2008: 18). In general, anti-poverty groups view food as an entitlement and focus on the failing social safety net, unemployment, low wages, the high cost of rent, unequal distribution of wealth, and the state’s increasing inability to provide for its citizens. From this perspective food is often peripheral, used primarily as a marker that points to larger challenges with the current social system.

The 1960s also saw the birth of a movement promoting ecological agriculture, focusing primarily on reducing the environmental impacts of food production and consumption (Guthman 2004). The movement’s proponents were less concerned with individual hunger and poverty than with opposing industrial practices such as biotechnology, chemical pesticide use and fertilizer toxicity. From an anti-poverty perspective, the goals of this movement are at best irrelevant, and at worst counterproductive. Since implementing more ecologically sustainable agricultural
methods often leads to rising food prices, the ecological farming movement has been perceived by some as counterproductive to increasing food access for low-income people, and more interested in promoting and selling ‘yuppy chow’ (Guthman 2003).

The healthy food movement is another ideological paradigm that gained popularity in the 1970s, and today represents the hegemonic way of relating food to human health. Described as “nutritionism” by its critics, this pejorative term is used to refer to the reductive focus on the nutrient composition of food and assumes that the central purpose of eating is to promote and maintain bodily health (Scrinis 2008). Currently, nutritionism is the basis of most dietary advice and has become the preferred way of marketing food products (Coveney 2000). As a neoliberal form of self-governance, individuals are expected to govern their behaviors in conformity with the latest health and nutrition information (Guthman and Dupuis 2006; Brady et al. 2012). In contrast, others have argued, “food is more than the mere sum of its constituent nutrients” (Dietitians of Canada 2009). In this vein, Michael Pollan (2007) notes that science does not fully understand the effect of food on the human body. Nutritionism, as a reductionist science, is an overly individualized effort to achieve health, while neglecting the complex social determinants that inform health practices (Crawford 1980).

An example of the way this separation of issues plays out, discussed in the literature (and mentioned throughout my interviews in the four case study provinces), is the perceived division between producers (most often rurally based) and eaters (the majority of which are located in urban centers). These divisions have been described is as a “good food gap”: the idea that farmers are unable to make a living growing food, and many eaters find it difficult to make the good food choices they want (Baker et al. 2010). For most Canadian farmers, the mass production of low-cost commodities (such as grains, corn, soy, fish and meat), increasing costs
of land, limited options to sell produce, and technological changes have all contributed to them receiving a decreased percentage of the consumer’s food dollar. As the gap between gross farm income and realized net farm income have increased, for over a decade, agribusiness corporations have captured 100% of the value of Canadian farm production (Qualman 2011: 20). Despite these realities, most urban food activists have been concerned primarily with widespread poverty and diet related health problems (e.g. cardiovascular disease, cancer, type-2 diabetes, and nutritional deficiencies), neglecting the position of farmers and farm workers. The good food gap, reinforced through programs and policies at multiple scales, has resulted in unforeseen and unacceptable consequences for not only farmers and eaters, but also the environment and the economy.

In response to these isolated approaches, the concept of community food security (CFS) was developed in the early 1990s in North America as an attempt to create a broad-based and systemic approach to reconnect food production and consumption and to ensure an adequate and accessible food supply (Toronto Food Policy Council 1994; Winne et al. 1997). The evolving concept of CFS is generally defined as “a situation 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” (Hamm and Bellows 2003: 37). Adopting CFS as a more comprehensive perspective, many AFIs attempted to integrate ideas of social justice, health and ecological concerns into their work with a focus on community self-reliance (Clancy 1994; Gottlieb and Fisher 1996; Anderson and Cook 1999; Bellows and Hamm 2002; Feenstra 2002; Trauger 2007).

Although CFS caught on widely in North America, many AFIs adopting this approach have been criticized for continuing to focus on isolated issues within the food system. For
example, a number of critics have suggested that many AFIs focus on ecological sustainability and community development without adequately addressing structural issues of poverty and inequality (Allen 1999; Tarasuk 2001; Slocum 2006; Allen 2008; Guthman 2008a; 2008b; Allen 2010). Without social justice at its core, AFIs risk engendering a two-tier food system in which entrepreneurial eco-initiatives create expensive niche food alternatives for those that can afford them and cheap food for everyone else. In the case of farmer’s markets for example, studies found that managers, vendors and customers had particular ideas of affluence and whiteness that become preformed and perpetuated in the market’s discourse and practice (Slocum 2006; 2007; Alkon and McCullen 2010). Considering this issue more broadly, Patricia Allen (2008) notes, “without a direct focus on justice issues, alternative agri-food efforts may only create marginal, safe spaces for the privileged that may simply serve as a bleeder valve for the dominant agri-food system” (159).

In sum, critics have suggested that some AFIs are complicit in an ongoing theoretical and practical isolation of issues and a separation of sectors within the food system. Failing to make connections between the interconnected elements can create new challenges that divert efforts away from addressing the systemic problems at the core of the corporate led industrial food system.

**Idealizing the “local” as inherently positive**

A third set of critiques addresses the ways that AFIs fetishize ideas of “local,” by assuming that foods produced in short geographic proximity have an innate association with positive attributes. Local food rhetoric is widespread among AFIs and prevalent in the popular media (Pollan 2006b; Smith and Mackinnon 2008; Kingsolver 2008). Typically, the goals of
local food efforts include developing regional markets for farmers and processors, strengthening local economies and building community by working collaboratively at a human scale (Feenstra 1997; Allen and Hinrichs 2007). Underlying ideas of localism for many AFI s is the notion that food system goals can be met primarily by turning to a localized, community-based food system. Critics have argued, however, that for many AFI s, the local scale is increasingly being evoked as a fixed and binary opposite to trends of global integration and corporate consolidation, which are seen as contrary to democratic governance within the food system (Hinrichs et al. 1998; Allen et al. 2003b; Winter 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006). In this sense, local - in contrast to the global - is assumed to be more ecologically sustainable (e.g. less food miles), health-promoting (e.g. better nutrients), transparent (e.g. reducing commodity fetishism along commodity chains), and economically beneficial (e.g. promoting higher economic gains within regional economies through reconnecting consumers and producers) (Born and Purcell 2006; Morgan 2010). For many AFI s “local” has become a goal in and of itself, and is assumed to be entirely desirable.

The problem however, is that a local food system may suffer from the same problems that afflict the globalized food system, and may do little address global inequalities. The local scale is not a static concept and ideas of social justice, community development and environmental sustainability have different meanings depending on the particular contexts in which they originate and thus cannot be carried forward unexamined (Allen et al. 2003b). Patricia Allen and her colleagues (2003b) argue that instead of relying on localism as the solution, AFI s must examine the difference between locals with respect to the particular social relations established in the places where these initiatives arise. In practice, fetishizing the local scale can result in multiple tensions that increase the challenges to community-based food organizing. For example, Hinrichs’ (2003) concept of “defensive localism” describes the construction of rigid barriers in
the protection of local spaces while exhibiting reluctance towards difference. These barriers have the potential to polarize and exclude particular cultural and social groups by portraying the perception of a homogeneous version of local that excludes the (non-local) other. Further, ignoring the reality that food system challenges are often caused by factors beyond the immediate community may obscure other scalar options that might be more effective (Purcell 2006).

The perceived inability of AFIs to adopt a more encompassing and reflexive food politics has also resulted in a backlash against the so-called “locavore” movement. One aspect of this backlash has come from critics that argue local initiatives do little or nothing to challenge systemic inequalities. In a sweeping critique of local food initiatives, Greg Sharzer (2012) writes that while some of these initiatives make slight improvements for a specific class of consumer (e.g. those that can afford the time and money required to participate), these well-meaning alternatives are bound by the same economic rules as the large corporations they oppose. For example, a small, locally owned business may produce a niche product of superior quality, but its capacity to survive in a capitalist market is still dependent on externalizing costs, exploiting labour and destroying the environment. Thus, the localist impulse may indeed be “both a reaction and product of neoliberal ideologies and practices” (Allen 2010: 296).

Other critics have argued that many of the claims made by AFIs - such as the environmental benefit of shortened supply chains - remain unsubstantiated. For example, an editorial in the New York Times, Stephen Budiansky (2010) criticized the local food movement for making selective and misleading assertions. He argued that locavore’s “do-gooder dogma” supporting the benefits of local eating ignores the most energy intensive aspects of the food system such as driving to the point of purchase, home preparation and storage. Others have
claimed that localism is a misleading marketing fad that threatens food affordability and the economic benefits of food trade for farmers in the global south (Shimizu and Desrochers 2008; Garside et al. 2007; McWilliams 2009).

Uncritically equating positive attributes to the local scale facilitates an appropriation of localism for purposes of financial gain. This is illustrated, for example, by the case of a Loblaw’s Companies Limited (Canada’s largest food distributor) marketing campaign launched in 2008 that promoted in-store seasonal local produce. By “bringing the farmers market to Canadian neighbourhood grocery stores,” Loblaw claims that their Grown Close to Home campaign offers “wholesome and affordable items from growers in your part of the country, conveniently available, seven days a week” (Loblaw 2010). In-store events, complete with hay bales, tractors and horse carts directly target the growing popularity of farmers’ markets and local food by offering a lower cost selection of fresh produce. Critical response to the campaign attempted to expose Loblaw’s loose definition of local which can include produce from anywhere in Canada (Alter 2010), and the erroneous positioning of imported produce under Grown Close to Home banners (Canadian Press 2010a). Critiques also argued that Loblaw’s campaign favoured large conventional growers since farmers participating in the program needed to meet regional distribution capacity requirements (Weeks 2010). Bob Chorney, president of Farmers’ Markets Canada, pointed out that farmers received only ten to twenty percent of the retail price of their produce at supermarkets, “not enough for a small family farm to survive on, while at farmers markets they get to keep an average 84%” (Canadian Press 2010b). This example illustrates that a sustainable and just food system is about much more than just the distance between production and consumption. Thus, while positive outcomes may result from food localism, the local scale cannot be assumed to be ultimately positive.
These three interrelated critiques provide an important caution against the potential for AFIIs to become complicit in a neoliberal governance strategy that produces isolated, individuated and unreflexive subjects and spaces and that rely on markets and monetary transactions to elicit social change. While these critiques elucidate important challenges, including the ways that AFIIs are embedded in neoliberalism, they often fail to recognize that AFIIs are already building coalitions and networks at regional, national and global levels and are collectively developing more nuanced critiques of dominant social, economic and political systems. This is an omission that my work seeks to address. Viewing AFIIs as working independently on isolated aspects of the food system provides an incomplete picture, and may unintentionally reinforce myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for future action. I return to this argument in the final section of this chapter. In the next section, I turn to social movement and network theories as a way to identify and analyze the existing collaborations among AFIIs. After tracing the trajectory of these debates, I draw on the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool for moving beyond overly narrow configurations of networks, exploring new forms of mobilization and understanding effective tactics and strategies for food system transformation.

**Social Movement Networks**

In this section I explore a range of perspectives that identify network building as central to the development of social movements. I also examine the scholarly literature that has used assemblage theories to expand the analysis of social movement networks. Building on this literature, I describe the way that networks can be characterized as interminable and constituted by the self-organization of diverse actors through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with
multiple and overlapping points of contact. I demonstrate that, using the concept of assemblages enables a richer understanding of networks and ways they might be more effective.

**Social movement theory**

In the broadest sense, social movements can be described as groups of individuals or organizations that form outside the state or political party system in an attempt to promote or prevent social change. While there is no consensus on an exact definition, della Porta and Diani’s (2006) review of the scholarly literature suggest that social movements are part of a “distinct social process, consisting of mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action: are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; share collective identity” (20). Della Porta and Diani also point out that social movements are constituted by longer lasting action as opposed to discrete one-off events. Tilly and Wood (2009) posit that social movements adopt a distinctive form of contentious politics: contentious in the sense that social movements involve collective making of claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else’s interests, and politics in the sense that governments of one sort or another figure somehow in the claim making, whether as claimants, objects of claims, allies of the objects, or monitors of the contention (3).

Social movement theory as an academic field rose to prominence in the 1960s. At the time, activists and analysts were wrestling with psychological accounts of collective behaviour that described social mobilization as irrational and emerging spontaneously based on immediate needs and rapidly changing economies within the capitalist state (della Porta and Diani 2006). These early perspectives were criticized for lacking analysis of the relationships between social and political structures, for taking the grievances of actors for granted, and for not adequately considering the role of human agency in the rise of social movements (Laclau 1985). By the late 1970s, culture and identity began to play a more central role in movement analyses, through the
integration of feminist, post-modernist and post-structural approaches (Melucci 1980; Touraine 1985; Carroll 1992; Staggenborg 2011). Described as new social movements (NSMs), these theorists explored how movements addressed post-material goals like protecting the environment and identity-based politics such as equal rights for women, Indigenous peoples, and queer communities (Staggenborg 2011). They challenged ideas of modernization and development with new claims involving issue specific foci, cross-class constituencies, the expression of multiple subject positions, and a much broader set of objectives than classical labour movements (Laclau 1985; Staggenborg 2008; Tarrow 2011). Critiques of NSM perspectives, however, have pointed to the limited participation of the working class, the particularistic characteristic of many movements with a consequent lack of focus on a common vision or unifying political project, and for promoting a kind of anti-politics with attention focused on lifestyle and individual identity as opposed to broader social change (Carroll 1992; Mooers and Sears 1992). Further, some have argued that there has been a limited engagement with the geographic and historical context of social mobilization (Miller 2000; Martin and Miller 2003).

Building on these classical and NSM perspectives, some scholars have pointed to the shifting dynamics of social movement activity over the past two decades and suggested that these approaches need to be further adapted to understand changing realities. Specifically, the rise of the global justice movement has led to new analytical perspectives that suggest both an integration and progression of existing theories (Conway 2004; Mertes and Belo 2004; Osterweil 2005; della Porta et al. 2006; Giugne et al. 2006; Escobar 2008; Juris 2008; Feixa et al. 2009).

Speaking to these new approaches, della Porta and Diani (2006) write, working-class action seems to be back with a vengeance; over all, mobilizations by the dispossessed (be they unskilled workers on precarious employment in the US, populations affected by famine and disease in Western Sudan, or local communities threatened by new dams in India) have gained increasing attention and visibility. Basic survival rights and social entitlements seem to play a more balanced role in
contemporary mobilizations, alongside more post-material ones, related to quality of life, than was the case in the recent past (vi-vii).

These globalized social movements have been described as place-based and observed to be using transnational networks to establish links to other people, places and to broader issues (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Osterweil 2005). The networking logic of the Internet (as well as the broader dynamics associated with late capitalism) have been identified as a key factor influencing the organizational structures of social movements as flexible, distributed network forms (Castells 1997; Bennett 2003; Escobar 2004; Juris 2008; Castells 2012).

The symbolic founding moment of the global justice movement is typically said to be the collective resistance efforts against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that came into force on January 1, 1995. Building on popular resistance in Mexico and using the Internet as artillery, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) used this moment to catalyze the growing opposition to neoliberal globalization. On the day that NAFTA came into force, the EZLN took control of the southern Mexican city of San Cristobal along with five other towns and large ranches in the state of Chiapas. The EZLN quickly gained a legitimate presence on the world stage as a new form of global organizing that rejected the use of force and concentrated global power, and used transnational networks in conjunction with local organizing to frame their resistance to neoliberal globalization (Johnston and Laxer 2003). Weis (2007) describes the Zapatista approach as “grounded locally while connecting to broader struggles . . . [through] globally networked, multi-scaled activism” (177; see also Slater 1997). The Zapatista’s mantra “one no, many yeses” came to symbolize a new form of social movement thinking that reflected a multi-scalar resonance of issues connected to local people’s histories. It emphasized a respect for difference and plurality as a basis for linking issues of democracy and social justice through a “globalization from below”.
Another example of the shifting dynamics of social movement organizing is presented by Arturo Escobar’s (2008) ethnographic studies of Afro-Colombian activists. Documenting these struggles, Escobar describes his observations of social movements building on a range of different practices and enacting new forms of collaboration through network building. He argues that the movements enact a new political logic that manifests as an emergent form of social mobilization, wherein participation occurs through various configurations of place-based actors coming together organically around common principles (see also Escobar et al. 2002). Escobar explains that networks manifest as “meshworks”, based on decentralized decision-making, self-organization, and heterogeneity with multiple frames and principles (see also De Landa 1997; Escobar 2004). In this way, global justice movements aim to resist forces that erase difference such as neoliberalism’s tendency to subsume all relationships into the market. Thus, for Escobar, the negotiation of place-based difference and a connection to common principles becomes the foundation for transnational solidarity against injustice. These principles are defended through networks where activists interact and act. These aspects of social mobilization have also been observed in other contemporary forms of movement organizing such as Occupy (Juris 2012) and democratic media activism (Carroll and Hackett 2006; Langois and Dubois 2005).

**Social movement network theory**

From these debates within social movement theory over the past fifty years, a body of scholarship has emerged that analyses human action and social change efforts as embedded in social relations and collective action organized through networks (Granovetter 1985; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Diani 2011). In the broadest sense, networks can be described as spatial arrangements that consist of a collection of linked actors (Gregory et al. 2009: 498). Social network analysis (SNA) is one of the primary ways that network perspectives have been used to
study social movements (Diani 2002). SNA was developed within the social sciences and has been used as a broad strategy to analyze network processes from the perspective of how network actors effect collective action and the creation of new linkages (Wasserman and Faust 1994; Borgatti et al. 2009; Marin and Wellman 2010). From this perspective, social networks are defined as a set of actors (nodes) with the analysis focusing on the specific relations that constitute ties among them (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 9). Thus, instead of viewing actors in isolation, a network perspective views social groups as a web of relationships and attempts to understand the patterns among the interactions (Wellman 1988). Today, there is a growing consensus in the literature that networks are central to social mobilization and that much can be learned about social movement activity by studying network relations (Diani 1992a; Diani and McAdam 2003; Dinai and Bison 2004; Diani 2011; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Nicholls 2009).

Social movements are engaged in a distinct type of networking that does more than enhance social connectedness. Networks can contribute to increased movement success by building alliances (Knoke 1990), facilitating the diffusion of ideas and practices (Gerlach 1971), contributing to a more sustained level of activity (Staggenborg 1998), and establishing a more desirable, legitimate, and democratic form of political organization (Hadenius 2001). Further, social movement networks are seen as locations where ideas, identities and frames are shared and exchanged, contributing to the development of a broader discourse and practice beyond the local scale (Diani 2003; Mische 2003). In many respects, network processes are the essence of a social movement (Diani and Bison 2004). Building and sustaining networks is what differentiates social movements from other instances of collective action, such as temporary coalitions or one-off activities. Put simply, social movement network-building processes are seen to be central to developing solidarity across sectors, scales and geographies and for engaging in social and/or political action.
Social movement network theories have contributed significantly to our current understanding of social mobilization. However, some scholars have suggested that existing theories are perhaps too rigid and normative in their conceptualization of social networks (e.g., Escobar 1992; Dempsey and Rowe 2004; Chesters and Welsh 2005; Escobar 2008; Feixa et al. 2009; Escobar and Osterweil 2010). The dominant network analysis of social mobilization has been criticized for providing only a snapshot in time and ignoring historical, geographic and social context (Thrift 1999; Miller 2000; Martin and Miller 2003; Escobar and Osterweil 2010). Another critique of network analysis is that some of its applications have inadequately conceptualized human agency tending towards structural determinism. For example, in a review of the literature, Mark Mizruchi (1994) notes, “The primary tenet of network analysis is that the structure of social relations determines the content of those relations” (130). Critics have argued that these kinds of deterministic approaches neglect the important role of actors’ beliefs, values, and normative commitments (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Escobar 2008).

**Mobilizing assemblages**

Since the 1990s, some social theorists have turned to assemblage theory in an attempt to better explain social dynamics (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; De Landa 1997; 2006). The application of assemblage to social movement network theory moves away from reductionist and positivist approaches to represent network processes as unpredictable and emergent, evolving, and adaptable.

Assemblage theory is a theoretical approach to thinking about the social world that describes a process by which heterogeneous entities combine to create a contingent whole (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; De Landa 2006). An assemblage is constituted by the non-hierarchical, self-organization of autonomous entities. The properties of individual components
within the assemblage do not fully explain the relations that constitute the whole. Instead, the capacity of a network emerges from the interactions of the components with each other (De Landa 2006). Accordingly, social formations are not considered to be fixed or stable, rather they are constructions of complex configurations, and in turn are part of other, more extended configurations. A central characteristic of assemblage theory is the idea of relations of exteriority: that any single component can be detached from one assemblage and plugged into another, thereby exhibiting different capacities (De Landa 2006). In other words, while an assemblage may appear as a whole, it is actually a collection of elements that may exhibit coherence and contradiction and are part of multiple different configurations and play different roles depending on their circumstance. The description of the food system in Chapter 1 is an example of an assemblage - an interactive, interdependent web of elements, activities and relationships that are neither fixed nor stable but always in flux. Further, this “food assemblage” can be understood as a complex configuration with each of the different elements, in turn, part of other extended configurations. Instead of thinking about a social movement network as a static thing composed of other things, assemblage theory suggest that social movement networks are a “meshwork” of non-hierarchical heterogeneous parts with a fluid configuration (Escobar 2008: 174, see also De Landa 1997; Kavada 2003; Escobar 2004). In a discussion of socio-spatial relations, Anderson and McFarlane (2011) suggest that the concept of assemblage emphasizes emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation . . . In this use, deploying the term assemblage enables us to remain deliberately open as to the form of the unity, its durability, the types of relations and the human and non-human elements involved (124).

Colin McFarlane (2009) has used assemblage theory to conceptualize space and power in social movements. In his research, McFarlane points to three processes emphasized by this lens. First, assemblage theory emphasizes mobilization as gathering, coherence and dispersion.
Describing mobilization in this way “draws attention to the labour of assembling and re-assembling sociomaterial practices that are diffuse, tangled and contingent” (562). Since they are never permanent, efforts to build and sustain an assemblage must take into consideration the specific spatial and temporal context under which actors align. Second, assemblage emphasizes groups and connections over individual organizations and isolated acts. In relation to the previous point about the efforts involved in building networks, this suggests the need to critically analyze the distribution of agency, causality and responsibility. McFarlane writes, “assemblages are emergent, nonlinear and processual rather than resultant formations, placing agency less in the realm of direct causes and more in the realm of sources which come together in particular events” (566). Since an assemblage is not a seamless whole, consideration must be given to the ways that actors engage with each other and change in response. Third, theories of assemblage in relation to social movements describe mobilization as emergent rather than a fixed spatial category. Thus, instead of being governed through a centralized structure, networks can be understood through multiple coexistences and a plurality in transformation. The concept of assemblage also contrasts the idea of scales as fixed. Almost by definition, a network, as assemblage, demonstrates that scale is a spatial relation socially constructed through struggle (Swyngedouw 1997; Marston 2000; Brenner 2001).

In this dissertation, I draw on the concept of assemblages to analyze the work of AFIs involved in network building. I use the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool to describe the way networks can be characterized as interminable and constituted by the self-organization of diverse actors through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. I assert that as these entities come together and exhibit dynamic properties that cannot be explained solely by the aggregation of their individual parts. The assemblages are thus always contingent and in process, shifting to accommodate internal and external dynamics and to
address the perceived problems of those involved. My objective of using this approach is to
move beyond overly narrow conceptions of networks, explore new forms of mobilization and
understand effective tactics and strategies for food system transformation. In the following
chapters, I use the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool to understand the structure and
role that AFI networks play in transforming the food system (I discuss the idea of assemblages
further in Chapter 5).

One of the primary benefits of using the analytic of assemblages is that it enables an
exploration of ways to make networks more effective. Theorizing networks as heterogeneous,
evolving and adaptive means that they cannot be fully controlled by any one individual or group.
At the same time, networks don’t just happen. The work of bringing autonomous actors together,
foraging connections and sustaining the networks requires a significant amount of work and
resources (McFarlane 2009). Tania Li (2007) suggests that using an assemblage framework has
the potential to “finesse questions of agency by recognizing the situated subjects who do the
work of pulling together disparate elements without attributing to them a master-mind or a
totalizing plan” (265). Thus, the advantage of using the assemblage analysis is that it draws
specific attention to the ongoing work required to link together the heterogeneous elements.
Later in this dissertation, I demonstrate that an immense amount of energy is required to sustain
network coherence and function, but that it needs to be exerted in a way that recognizes and
respects the networks decentralized structure along with the autonomy of its actors.

One way to think through the efforts involved in holding networks together is presented
by the warrior-builder-weaver framework advanced by Steve Stevenson, Kathryn Ruhf, Sharon
Lezberg and Kate Clancy (2008; also see Hinrichs et al. 1998). Developed with the intention of
improving diverse efforts to transform the food system, the framework describes three broad AFI
orientations: “warrior” activities that are interventionist with a goal to change political and economic structures along with civil society beliefs; “builder” activities that seek to create alternative initiatives either within the economic sector or by creating new political structures; and “weaver” activities that aim to develop strategic and conceptual linkages within and between warrior and builder activities through network building. More specifically, the role of weaver organizations is to establish horizontal linkages “based on space and locality by facilitating alliances across agrifood work and complimentary social change efforts within a bounded area,” and vertical linkages involving “strategic connections between structural, geographic, or analytical levels” (Stevenson et al. 2008: 47). The role of weaver organizations is key to food system change because it considers the integrated relationships between different AFI discourses, approaches, mobilizing structures and the perceived opportunities of adopting more comprehensive and diversified approaches. My research draws on the conceptualization of network weavers to explore the work of provincial network organizations that are attempting to foster and sustain food networks in Canada. Understanding the structures and functions of these networks and the ways that weavers operate is an important step towards determining how AFIs can be more effective in their work. I discuss the role of PNOs as weavers in more detail in Chapter 6.

Towards a Transformative Food Politics

In this final section I bring together the literature on social movement networks and the critiques of AFIs to elaborate on a theoretical and practical framework for what a transformative food politics might look like. This framework describes the attempts to address the root causes of challenges within the corporate led industrial food system, rather than just the symptoms. Yet, it is not meant to provide a definitive solution or step-by-step guide for actors. Instead, the
framework is a tool to explore the collaborations among AFIs and to present possible directions for the growing food movement in the global north. I begin this section by returning to my central argument for the need to explore AFIs working in collaboration as opposed to studying them as isolated, individual efforts. I suggest that using the analytic of assemblages helps to identify new possibilities for social change. I conclude by outlining my framework for a transformative food politics through three interrelated elements: the transition to collective subjectivities, a comprehensive food system approach, and a politics of reflexive localization.

**Possibilities for transformation**

Some researchers that study AFIs as working independently on isolated issues tend to group them together under single dogmatic ideologies (e.g. localism) and assess them as fixed entities in relation to a specific set of criteria. Many of these studies tend to rely on a binary perspective that assumes AFIs are either promoting a radical alternative to a monolithic “conventional” food system or are complicit with that system and a hindrance to systemic change (Holloway et al. 2007; Maxey 2007). While these analyses may contribute to broader debates about resistance, they can also lead to overly narrow conclusions. For example, in Greg Sharzer’s (2012) book *No Local*, he makes a sweeping classification of “local food initiatives” as either directly challenging capitalism, and thus worthy of our efforts, or part of the problem. Drawing explicitly on a classical Marxist approach, Sharzer groups together a wide variety of AFIs as “localists”, while ignoring their differences, the actual work they are doing, and the ways they are collaborating. Sharzer’s failure to identify the nuanced realities of his case studies results in the construction of a “straw man” argument with which many so-called localists would have trouble relating. Another example is Madeleine Fairbairn’s (2011) research on the transformative potential of US-based AFIs. Relying entirely on organizational websites, she
concludes that most AFIs are focused exclusively on either global issues or on local control. Like Sharzer, Fairbairn’s study ignores the actual work of AFIs and their relationships with broader networks that address more integrated objectives. These are just two examples of studies that analyze AFI efforts as individual and working in isolation, leading to overly narrow conclusions.

While these kinds of analyses attempt to apply important critiques (as described in the first section of this chapter), they ignore current forms of collaboration and the ways that AFIs can serve different functions, shift over time, and can become an entry point towards broader political engagement. For example, a number of critical theorists have demonstrated that studying relationships among AFIs and the contexts in which they are embedded can produce a different set of possibilities for social change (Belasco 1989; Maxey 2007; Jarosz 2008; Wright and Middendorf 2008; Lockie 2009; Wilson 2012). In reality, neither AFIs nor their socio-political environment are static or monolithic. Reductionist approaches risk reifying neoliberalism as a hegemonic project (Barnett 2005) and foreclose opportunities for change by limiting the range of conceptual possibilities for action. In other words, viewing AFIs through a binary lens provides an incomplete picture and may unintentionally reinforce myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for action.

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that AFIs each exhibit a range of characteristics that can best be understood in relation to the particular context in which they emerge, to other AFIs with which they interact, and to the broader political and economic circumstances in which they operate. My research studies network actors in context through a rich empirical approach to understand them relationally in regards to social change. The concept of assemblages contributes to the analysis by viewing networks as heterogeneous, self-organizing and exhibiting dynamic
properties that cannot be explained solely by the aggregation of their individual parts. Further, the interactions and activities within the networks are also understood as constantly shifting to accommodate internal and external dynamics. These ideas are aligned with post-structural approaches that acknowledge the social and discursive construction of knowledge and subjects while rejecting essentialist or totalizing explanations of the world (Gibson-Graham et al. 2001). Post-structural perspectives suggest the presence of diverse economic spaces operating on a different logic than capitalist accumulation (Gregory et al. 2009: 571). According to Larner (2011), viewing neoliberalism as a “preconstituted theoretical explanation and self-evident descriptor of contemporary forms of economic, political, social and environmental change” (323) can result in reproducing and reifying a monolithic narrative, leaving little space for new forms of collective action. Similarity, Gibson-Graham (2006) write, “The way we represent capitalism (as all-encompassing and pervasive, or as uneven, fragile, and less extensive than imagined) has an important impact on the way we imagine, act, and claim new spaces of intervention” (74). In other words, by employing a “capitalocentric\(^3\)” discourse (i.e. the capitalist economy as stable, singular and self-reproducing) we confine already existing alternative experiments and limit the scope of our political imaginary.

The need for more nuanced perspectives of dominant political-economic structures have been widely discussed by critical geographers who have demonstrated that neoliberalism is socially and geographically uneven, plural and contested (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Conceptualizing neoliberalism as socially constructed and materially shifting (in different places

\(^3\) JK Gibson Graham explain, “When we say that most economic discourse is ‘capitalocentric,’ we mean that other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are often understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism’s space or orbit” (2006: 6).
at different times) enables turning “notions of inevitability into potential resources in the long-term political project of ‘deliberalizing’ space” (Bondi and Laurie 2005: 399). The identification of the cracks in neoliberalism’s uneven and contradictory nature enables an exploration and experimentation of the possibilities within those constraints. Lewis (2009) writes, “If neoliberalism is constituted by an imperfect assemblage of imperfect projects that are then imperfectly implemented, then there is far greater capacity for resistance, subversion, or mobilization of alternative projects and enactment of different imaginaries than are allowed for in dominant readings of neoliberalism” (116-117). Likewise, Lee and Layshon (2003) suggest that neoliberalism’s internal contradictions provide small openings and opportunities to disengage from market imperatives and construct new relationships and different experiences. They write,

> Re-imagining capitalism as a network that has constantly to be achieved, it becomes possible to identify those places within space economies where the network is very weak, and where potential exists for new forms of alliances, social formations and economic geographies first to take root, then to become established, and finally to flower and bloom (12).

Some scholars have considered the possibilities for systemic transformation through identifying opportunities to engage in relationships and practices different from those within neoliberalism. Discussing the concept of “real utopias,” Erik Olin Wright (2010) points to the need for experimentation with alternatives that embody aspirations for a just and humane world. Wright points to projects such as Quebec’s social economy, the Modragon workers cooperative in the Basque region of Spain, and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil as “real utopian” experiments that provide immediate improvements but more importantly, establish the institutional elements of alternatives in the here and now. Wright maintains that by building new institutions inside capitalism, in the world we live, we can push the logics of system transformation enabling us to build further into the future. In a similar vein, John Holloway
(2010) argues that anti-capitalist activities occur every day, through exploiting structural cracks in subversive acts. Instead of waiting for a great revolution, Holloway maintains that the “only way to think of changing the world radically is as a multiplicity of interstitial movements running from the particular” (11). He provides a wealth of examples from the autoworker that spends his evenings as part of a community garden as a meaningful and pleasurable activity, to the indigenous peasants that create and defend an autonomous space of self-government. Similar to the concept of assemblages, Holloway describes these actions as part of an evolving movement without a common ideology, identity or approach, yet with a similar rejection of the “cohesive logic of capitalism” (23) either by conscious choice or forced expulsion. Speaking directly to the kinds of networked resistance emerging in the interstices of the dominant food system, Friedmann and McNair (2008) write,

> Just as plants growing through cracks in asphalt can eventually replace a roadway with a forest, tiny projects in the interstices of agrifood capitals might potentially – and eventually – become a new way of organizing food and agriculture, at once locally embedded and globally connected (427).

Analyzing the collaborative efforts of AFIs as overlapping assemblages and the possibilities for resistance within neoliberalism can provide a better understanding of the way that network activities might contribute to food system transformation. Building on the literature presented thus far, I conclude this chapter by outlining a framework for a transformative food politics.

**Framework for a transformative food politics**

I use the concept of a transformative food politics to describe the different strategies and activities that attempt to move beyond making slight changes to the current food system towards a reconceptualization of both the root of current dilemmas and of the solutions that will address them (Levkoe 2011a). Instead of simply lamenting the effects of existing systems, or pointing to an end goal of the kind of system we desire, a transformative food politics would engage in a
continual dialectic between what is and what ought to be with a focus on the processes of transformation. It is a kind of “real utopian” experiment (Wright 2010) that helps to think about, and act on the possibilities for transformation while being aware of unintended consequences of our actions and the normative trade offs. Conceptualizing provincial food networks as assemblages emphasizes that the networks are not static, but are constantly shifting and evolving in relation to the multitude of participating AFIs and the external political and social conditions. Working within these dynamics demands a reflexive approach that understands the world as

*relational and process-based rather than perfectionist.* This relational worldview admits that its vision is never perfect but always can be improved by working in relationship with others, especially when informed by an open, reflexive, and contested view of ‘improvement’ as an idea and process” (Goodman et al. 2012: 6, emphasis in the original).

With respect to a transformative food politics, reflexivity refers to AFIs involved in an ongoing process of critically examining their own ideology and practice in relation to the broader social and political context and being open to changing their course of action as a result of these reflections.

Conceptualizing networks as assemblages also emphasizes the diversity of the participating AFIs and the potential benefits that can emerge from their mutual interactions. A transformative food politics would build on Stevenson at al.’s (2008) call for an inclusion of both warrior and builder activities as opposed to relying on singular strategic alternatives (for similar schemas also see Wright 2006; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). For example, warrior activities that attempt to directly engage the state and sever reliance on existing institutions and social structures have the potential to open up possibilities for other types of action. Builder activities that aim to create new institutions in the cracks of the existing system can exploit the uneven nature of neoliberalism. Alone, each of these strategies would be insufficient, but as interconnected complementarities, they can push the logics of system transformation opening space for future
action. In the short term, for example, builder activities may not appear to challenge the interests of the dominant classes. However, complimented by warrior initiatives, in the long term they can explore and create models that develop into viable alternatives and shift the balance of power towards broader social empowerment. In this research I pay particular attention to the role of PNOs as weavers and their efforts to foster and sustain the networks. As part of a transformative food politics, weavers must find ways to bring together a wide range of different perspectives and approaches and take advantage of the mutual benefits of the different strategic orientations.

Building on the literature presented in this chapter, I propose a set of three interrelated elements as a framework to consider the specifics of what a transformative food politics might look like: the transition to collective subjectivities a comprehensive system approach, and a politics of reflexive localization. I introduce these elements below and describe them in greater detail and in relation to the case study networks in Chapter 7.

First, in response to critiques that suggest AFIs are complicit in normalizing neoliberal governance and creating neoliberal subjectivities (Allen and Guthman 2006; Guthman 2008b; Sharzer 2012), the first element of a transformative food politics is the shift from individualized market mechanisms as the mode for change to collaborative mobilization around collective needs. This transition to collective subjectivities is rooted in the idea that instead of being solely determined through market processes, food is part of a commons and should be collectively controlled by, and guaranteed to all people (Wuyts 1992; McMurtry 1999). Facilitating this transition begins with individual needs and desires but also demands engaging differences along with the identification of shared interests and mutual benefits (Haarstad 2007; Gibson-Graham 2006). A transformative food politics would identify and act upon problems at the core of the food system through refocusing analysis from the individual towards the collective as the primary agent of change. Using the four case studies, I explore the way that AFIs involved in
provincial networks are promoting collective subjectivities and engaging in collaborative food-related activities to develop a food system that meets collective social needs.

The second element of a transformative food politics builds on critiques that suggest AFIs have focused on isolated problems within the food system (Goodman and DuPuis 2002), and failed to adopt approaches that consider the multifaceted and interrelated elements, activities and relationships that bring food to our plates. Critics argue that failing to make connections between these interconnected elements can create new challenges that divert efforts away from addressing the systemic problems at the core of the food system (Allen 1999; Tarasuk 2001). From this, a comprehensive food system approach can be described as a perspective that integrates social justice, ecological sustainability, community development and democracy throughout all aspects of the food system. This perspective recognizes different solutions as mutually beneficial and contributes to a transformative food politics by engaging in a critical reflection of existing practices along with the broader sociopolitical context. In this dissertation, I explore the way that the provincial networks are facilitating a comprehensive food system approach among participating AFIs.

Finally, where AFIs have idealized the local scale as inherently positive (Allen et al. 2003b; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Winter 2003; Sharzer 2012), a politics of reflexive localization refers to transcending a static interpretation of the meaning of local while simultaneously preserving and maintaining unique characteristics and diversities developed in place. In other words, a transformative food politics begins with AFIs working on particular projects in place but would move beyond day-to-day activities to create a wider politicized culture of action. A reflexive perspective of “local” would recognize and encourage difference within and beyond local spaces (Hinrichs 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006). By problematizing ideas of local, AFIs could begin to break down barriers as opposed to
build them up (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). A transformative food politics involves making localism an open, ongoing and processed-based vision as opposed to a fixed set of standards or an end in and of itself. Using the four case studies, I examine how involvement in provincial networks can facilitate a politics of reflexive localization.

I discuss each of these three elements in more detail in Chapter 7, and use them to analyze the collaborative work of AFIs and explore the strengths and limitations of networks in achieving food system transformation.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have drawn on a range of literatures to outline a theoretical and practical framework that will be used throughout this dissertation to examine provincial AFI networks. While existing analyses of AFIs have contributed to an important dialogue, much of this research has studied AFIs as fixed entities working independently on isolated aspects of the food system. While this can provide important insight into the strengths and weaknesses of particular AFOs, it can also overlook the ways that AFIs work in collaboration, serve different functions, learn and change over time, and become entry points towards broader political action. My objective in the chapters that follow is to build on existing research and begin to address these gaps through an analysis of AFIs and their collaborative efforts as part of provincial food networks. Before discussing the research findings, the next chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, methods used, and my role as an engaged researcher as a central part of this process.
Chapter 3
Navigating the Spaces Between:
Research Design and Methods

*A network is a methodology – not a structure. It is a way of working together.*
~ Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker, Director, Sustain Ontario (from Building Strong and Effective Networks, a session at the Bring Food Home Conference, Peterborough Ontario, October 28, 2011)

A primary objective of this research has been to work in collaboration with the provincial food networks as part of a collective desire to transform the food system. In this sense, my research responds to William Friedland’s (2008) call for academics to make knowledge creation visible by transcending boundaries between academic responsibilities in the university and supporting movements that work for the betterment of society. In this chapter, I explain my research as a community-based action project and detail the rationale behind my selection of the methods and my experiences working with the research participants. I argue that when done well, community-based research (CBR) can increase the quality and validity of the research results as well as contribute to progressive social change efforts. To this ends, CBR demands a high degree of reflexivity that considers the role of the researcher in relation to the communities of study and the ways that institutional and community contexts play a role in shaping the research process and its outcomes. Throughout the research process I have been an active part of numerous different networks, some directly related to the research (e.g. working with participant organizations, being a student at the University of Toronto), and others more peripheral (e.g. working with other organizations, volunteering in my neighbourhood). Drawing on my experiences as part of these different and often overlapping networks has been an integral part of the research process. As I moved through these different networks, I was never fully an insider
or outsider to the communities of study but was consistently navigating the spaces between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

I begin this chapter by drawing on a range of literature to outline the way I have come to understand CBR as a reflexive practice that aims to transcend boundaries between the researcher and subject. Next, I discuss my personal journey to this topic of study and my positionality in order to contextualize my role in the research project. I then present a narrative of the research process, detailing the way partnerships were developed and collaboration maintained, and how the data was collected and used. Specifically, I outline the primary methods used to examine the provincial food networks: a network survey, site visits, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and popular education workshops. The chapter concludes with some reflections on my experiences in relation to the benefits and limitations of CBR as a methodological process. By foregrounding these issues, the intention is to make my relationship with the research process explicit and to highlight my connection (and disconnection) with the participants of the study.

**Practicing Community-Based Research**

At its most basic level, CBR is a process of inquiry that aims to engage groups of people and engender a co-creation of knowledge. As a practice, it was developed as an explicit critique of the ontological and epistemological rigidity attributed to positivism, whereby objective knowledge exists separate from the knower and the researcher as distant and value-free (Israel et al. 1998). CBR has been used as a strategy to establish democratic relationships and to promote progressive social change around issues that are important to specific groups (Ansley and Gaventa 1997; Savan and Sider 2003). As a collaborative and reflexive endeavor, the application of CBR acknowledges the inseparable nature of the researcher and subject of study (Guba and
Lincoln 1994). Feminist and postmodern theory have informed CBR practices including the acknowledgment of a researcher’s positionality and encouraging reflexively that connects ways of knowing to ways of researching (McDowell 1992).

While there is no one method associated with it, CBR can be described by three general characteristics: 1) it is conducted within a particular community (geographic or otherwise) where the research question has relevance to the participants; 2) it emphasizes collaboration between professional and non-professional researchers in the process of research design, implementation and dissemination (e.g., a partnership between grassroots activists/non-profit organizations and university/professional researchers); and 3) it is research that is political and action-oriented (i.e. it aims to contribute to concrete and constructive social change) (Savan and Sider 2003; Flicker et al. 2007). In a seminal review of the literature, Israel et al. (1998) identified a number of important contributions made by CBR, including: enhancing the relevance and usefulness of the research data; connecting partners with diverse knowledge and skills to address complex problems; improving the quality and validity of the research; encouraging reflexivity among both researchers and participants; and, improving the overall well-being of the communities involved.

While CBR generally includes these basic principles, the degree to which each of them is met may vary depending on the specific project and the interpretation of the researcher. In their review of the ways that CBR has been used, Israel et al. (1998) also identified numerous tensions that have arisen between practitioners and communities, including: a lack of trust and respect resulting from researchers taking advantage of communities and not providing feedback (in some cases causing direct harm to participants); power differentials between researchers and community members; differences in perspectives, priorities, assumptions, values, beliefs and language; conflicts over control and distribution of funding; and, conflicts related to how the
community is defined that can ignite tensions between community members. Related to these tensions, some critics have argued that research focused on social change initiatives has been detached from the realities of the actors involved (Dempsey and Rowe 2004; Bevington and Dixon 2005; Friedland 2008). For example, some CBR researchers have been accused of being out of touch with activists’ day-to-day struggles, and more concerned with personal career advancement (e.g. academic publishing) and reasserting academic credentials (Fuller and Kitchin 2004). Interestingly, these accusations echo earlier critiques of positivist research that rallied against sharp distinctions between objective scientific knowledge and subjective experience and practice (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Beyond the choices made by researchers, there are many structural constraints to engaging in CBR - namely the way that community groups (as partners) have been impacted by the “roll-out” of neoliberal forms of institution building and social policy making (Peck and Tickell 2002; also, see Chapter 2). Further, researchers need to be aware of the ways that involvement in community work may actually contribute to this process of neoliberalization. As government social service provision has been eroded, responsibility for tackling social and economic issues has increasingly fallen to the non-profit sector. Instead of the state taking responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, non-profit organizations have stepped up to fill the void, resulting in compromised and unsustainable service provision (Wolch and Dear 1989; Mitchell 2001). Critics have argued that universities are implicated in this shift through the promotion and encouragement of community partnerships (Catungal 2007; Levkoe et al. Under Review). Thus, while CBR has the potential to support social transformation efforts, there are numerous tensions and challenges that must be confronted in the process. A critical examination of the academic researcher’s impact on a community, both directly and indirectly, is an important part of understanding how CBR can be a more effective tool for social change. Far from being a
neutral or objective actor, I demonstrate through my own experiences that researchers play a deeply interventionist role, influencing the outcome of a study.

**The role of a researcher**

John Herron (1996) proposed that understanding the human experience requires more than simply conducting experiments on other people. He suggested that a researcher must be authentically a part of the experience for human relations to be properly explored and understood. While I agree with this sentiment, I also propose that the researcher plays a complex role in the research process whether consciously or unintended (Kanuha 2000; Siemiatycki 2012). Writing about fieldwork in sociology, Raymond Gold (1950) suggests that a researcher’s positionality can be described through a spectrum ranging from complete participation to complete detachment. Gold rightly points out however, that regardless of where positionality lies, all researchers face a range of personal and professional demands that influence the research process. Preparing for my own research, I was particularly interested in exploring the way that other researchers had articulated their role in relation to communities with which they were also involved and supported.

Early writings in the field of anthropology were heavily criticized for their colonialist approaches and ethnocentric conclusions about the groups under study (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Narayan 1993). More recently, references to “insider research,” have been used to explain shared language, identity or an experiential base between a researcher and participants. Evered and Louis (1981) make the distinction between *inquiry from the inside*, which describes researchers immersed in local places involved in the generation of contextually embedded knowledge, and *inquiry from the outside*, which refers to researchers detached from the participants generating
knowledge considered context-free. Neither of these perspectives is limited to a specific research paradigm but can be found across academic disciplines (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

The debates surrounding so-called insider positions have generally focused on the potential benefits and challenges that can arise. It has been suggested that pre-existing relationships with a population under study could provide perceived legitimacy along with more rapid and complete acceptance (Adler and Adler 1987; Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Critics however, have pointed to the problematic nature of being too close to participants and having a personal stake and/or emotional investment in the issues. Writing from within the nursing profession, Marilyn Asselin (2003) identifies a number of areas where insider researchers should exercise caution. These include: coming to the research with preexisting ideas about the population which could lead to overlooking important data; expectations, past experiences, beliefs, and emotions that can overly bias data analysis; and, the ways that a researcher’s presence in a group might influence interactions. Critics have also argued that a lack of distance and objectivity can result in low quality research and lack of intellectual rigor (Anderson and Herr 1999; Alvesson, 2003).

Analyses that construct the researcher as either an insider or outsider can be a useful part of a broader analysis of positionality. However, this binary perspective provides little insight into understanding the complexity of the human condition and subjectivity of the researcher. Summarizing this complexity, Kanauha (2000) writes:

For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied (444).

As such, insider and outsider positions are not opposite poles where a researcher occupies either
one space or the other. A binary conception of researcher positionality serves only to reify the categorical duality and resulting tensions (as described above). Sandra Acker (2000) suggests the possibility that “the insider-outsider question cannot be fully resolved, but that we can try to work creatively within its tensions” (189). Accordingly, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) posit that more important than deciphering insider or outsider status is the researcher’s ability “to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (59). They go on to identify a space between, which demands accepting the multilayered complexity of the human experience. The space between is proposed as a space of “paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction” (60). Dwyer and Buckle write,

Perhaps, as researchers we can only ever occupy the space between. We may be closer to the insider position or closer to the outsider position, but because our perspective is shaped by our position as a researcher (which includes having read much literature on the research topic), we cannot fully occupy one or the other of those positions (61).

In my research I adopt the concept of navigating the spaces between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009) to express the blurring of boundaries of being either “inside” or “outside” of the communities of study. Rather then simply a bridging of two solitudes, navigation refers to wandering in the various shared spaces of ones experiences, which overlap with those of others. Like assemblages (as described in Chapter 2; also see De Landa 2006), communities are not fixed or stable but are shifting and only ever in a process of construction. From this perspective, communities can be conceptualized as a collection of people, relationships, cultures, etc. that are also a part of multiple different configurations that play different roles depending on the circumstances. In any particular moment, a researcher may have different levels of access to the different nested (or overlapping) communities. The practice of navigating the spaces between comes with its own set of challenges that demand an ongoing level of reflexivity throughout the
research process including a constant awareness of ones positionality, assumptions and biases (Asselin 2003; Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

In summary, by acknowledging the complex role of the researcher and adopting the concept of navigating the spaces between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009), we are better equip to understand the act of wandering through the various shared spaces of ones experiences where identities, ideals and professional obligations intersect (and overlap with those of others).

Approaching research through the navigation of these different experiences shifts positionality from a fixed location to embodying the fluid spaces of our daily lives, including the places we inhabit, our multiple relationships and subject formations. From my experience, the spaces between are rarely comfortable, but are fraught with contradictions and struggles. I propose that navigating these spaces forces researchers to confront issues of power in relation to the communities with which they work but can also provide important benefits from strengthening the validity of the research findings to impacting the strategies and activities being used for social change. Thus, the spaces between are a manifestation of intersecting differences and a place to share, negotiate and to learn. I do not assume that navigating these spaces promises any kind of resolution, but that critically engaging in this messy terrain assures an enhancement of CBR as a practice. I use the concept of navigating the spaces between in the following section to discuss my positionality and contextualize my role in relation to the research process.

**Navigating the Spaces Between: Contextualizing My Role in the Research**

The process of conceptualizing, designing and conducting this research was an interplay of ideas between my PhD supervisor, the research partners, the hundreds of participants, and countless others both internal and external to the food networks. I came to this project having
worked with a number of alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and food networks over the past decade. My entry into the field of food studies came in 2002 when I began working with The Stop Community Food Centre (The Stop), a non-profit organization in Toronto, Canada. Over the past 30 years, The Stop has evolved from a food bank offering emergency relief into a thriving community centre where people come together to grow, cook, and share food, and where people advocate for measures to increase food security on a broader level. During my time with The Stop, I was inspired by the way the organization’s interrelated programs had such a strong impact, personally on its members and on a broader political level. I also realized that The Stop was not acting alone, but was part of a groundswell of food related activities in Toronto. Furthermore, I recognized that the multitude of Toronto-based organizations were deeply connected and involved in (and influenced by) regional, national, and increasing global food networks. Once I left my staff position at The Stop, I became involved in a number of other food related initiatives and networks. These experiences included working as a farmer and co-director of SunRoot Farm and Eco-Solidarity Association in Nova Scotia, and as the administrator and executive board member for the Canadian Association for Food Studies-L’Association Canadienne des Études sur l’Alimentation (CAFS/ACÉA), a nation non-profit organization that brings together academic and community-based researchers in the area of food studies.

From these experiences, I began to read the emerging body of literature that spoke to the potential for food to be a catalyst for mobilization as well as a new transformative social movement (see for example, Belasco 1989; Allen 2004; Wekerle 2004; Pollan 2006; Desmarais 2007; Patel 2007). Parallel to this, I observed that provincial network organizations (PNO) had evolved in almost every Canadian province. Each one seemed different in its structure and constitution but had a similar mandate to support local and regional initiatives and to facilitate network building within the province. The PNOs also aimed to serve as an intermediary between
place-based AFIs and national level organizing. These observations became most evident during my work with the People’s Food (PFP) Policy project that was originally proposed in 2007. As part of this project, PNOs served as key organizing bodies as part of a cross-Canada mobilization effort, linking local AFIs to provincial, national and global networks (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 for more detail on the PFP). As I reflected on the intersections between these moments and emerging ideas about collaboration, I began to formulate questions about the ways that AFIs in Canada were mobilizing around food-related issues and negotiating traditional notions of place and scale. These questions led to discussions with various network actors about the possibilities for a broader research project. When I began the PhD program in 2008, I used these discussions as the basis for my plan of study and for the proposal for this dissertation research.

The research process was deeply influenced by previous relationships with the AFIs and the PNOs as well as by my personal experiences which all had to be negotiated on a daily basis. The realities of my time and resources forced me to make trade-offs between academic priorities, the needs of my family, volunteer commitments, and professional responsibilities. For example, as a PhD student, I was required to develop areas of academic competency, identify a time-limited research project, design a proposal, apply for ethics approval prior to actively engaging in the partnerships, and submit a thesis as the basis for completing my graduate degree. In some respects, this was contrary to CBR principles, since I had ultimate control of the research process and a vested interest in a particular outcome. I also needed to balance my time between work and family, which made travel and prolonged fieldwork difficult. I have two young children (one born during the process of the research), which made it challenging to be away for extended periods of time. I needed to work during the graduate program taking jobs as a course director, teaching assistant, research assistant, along with additional positions outside the University. When possible, I made efforts to connect these opportunities to my research. For example, I
taught two graduate service learning courses and had students work with my research participants as community partners to produce high-level research reports. I also offered my labour to the networks in support of their work. For example, I facilitated key organizing sessions at the provincial gatherings (in Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia), assisting with PNO evaluations (in Manitoba and Ontario), and gave talks at public events during my fieldwork (in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia). I also became involved with Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (FSC/SAC), helping to establish and coordinate a working group for provincial networks, which brought together organizations at national conferences and regular telephone meetings.

During the research, I was also an active volunteer in my community, chairing the steering committee of a neighbourhood community garden, serving on the Board of Directors for CAFS/ACÉA, and as a member of the parent-teacher council of my daughter’s school. I also received (and accepted) multiple requests to speak about my research at public events. Through these teaching and volunteer activities, I was embedded in multiple networks, some directly related to my PhD research and others more peripheral. However, all of these experiences became part of my identity throughout the course of the research process and my relationships with the research participants. While these many activities limited the amount of time I was able to invest in the formal research, they greatly enhanced my use of a CBR approach. For example, during field visits I drew on these experiences (e.g. my work with The Stop, farming, community gardening, etc.) to make personal connections, give public talks, and prompt discussion during interviews.

These different aspects of my positionality (i.e. a blurred insider-outsider status) as well as other factors over which I have little control (e.g. my class, gender, race, culture, etc.) all
played a role in the points of connection and disconnection with the research participants. Further they may have impacted the kinds of information people shared in unintentional ways. For example, as an active member of the networks people may have divulged certain information due to higher levels of trust. On the other hand they may have been more hesitant to give critical responses due to my connections with other AFIs and individuals in the network. While confidentiality agreements may have provided another level of assurance, the way that people react in an interview setting may not have always been a conscious choice. Most of the research participants tended to be women, and my presence as a white, educated man may have also influenced the level of trust within the interactions. These different ways that the participants might have perceived me, or ways that I may have acted in my role as researcher further emphasize the overlapping networks that I am nested within. These varied personal and professional experiences that constitute my character became a starting place for the relationships I developed with the research participants, and the places that were part of the study. Considering all of the intersecting networks that constitute my positionality, my role as a researcher in this particular study demanded navigating the spaces between being strictly inside or outside the communities of study.

**The Research Process**

The decision to study provincial level mobilization around food evolved from my direct personal experiences working with various AFIs and food networks. The research process evolved through conversations between academic and professional colleagues as well as with the participants. In this section I explain the research processes and the different methods that were used in this study: a network survey, site visits, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and popular education workshops. In Table 3.1 I summarize the key moments in the research process.
Table 3.1: Key moments in the research process
(Note: the text in italics represents activities that were related to the research but not directly part of the academic process)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key Moments in the Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>The beginning of the PhD program and the formal inception of the research conceptualization through discussions with my academic supervisor and colleagues from the food networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May - June 2009</td>
<td>Initial connections were made with primary partners to confirm participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2009</td>
<td>A Social Science and Humanities Research Council grant proposal was developed and submitted (with Dr. Sarah Wakefield) as the first articulation of the research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>The comprehensive examination was completed which enabled delving into the background literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td><em>The author began volunteering as the administrator for CAFS/ACÉA</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>Approval was received of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council grant; research partners were informed and participation was confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>A panel discussion was organized on Canadian food networks with representatives from food networks in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and National (FSC/SAC) at the CAFS/ACÉA assembly in Montreal, Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td><em>The author played a lead role in the production of the report “In Every Community A Place for Food: The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable and Just Food System” which initiated a national effort to establish community food centres across Canada</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June/July 2010</td>
<td>The research proposal was approved by the departmental advisory committee; ethics review was approved by the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>Primary partners were consulted about the network survey (e.g., survey content, distribution plans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September - November 2010</td>
<td>The provincial network survey was designed with the primary research partners and administered in each of the four case study provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>A session was organized on provincial food networks at the FSC/SAC national assembly in Montreal, Quebec with project partners; <em>the author was part of the formal initiation of a national working group for provincial networks through FSC/SAC</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010 – January 2011</td>
<td>Meetings were held with project partners to discuss site visits and which organizations to include for in-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2011</td>
<td>A pilot interview was conducted with Sustain Ontario and the interview guide was revised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – March 2011</td>
<td>Field work was conducted in Manitoba including: attending the Growing Local provincial gathering, facilitating the popular education workshop, making site visits, and conducting interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
March 2011  The first issue of the Transformative Food Politics newsletter was published to provide research participants with updates on the research as well as a sample of the initial findings

April 2011  The author was the lead facilitator/writer on the tenth working paper of the People’s Food Policy Project on food democracy and governance

April – October 2011  Field work was conducted in Ontario including: attending the Bring Food Home provincial gathering, facilitating the popular education workshop, making site visits, and conducting interviews

May - June 2011  Field work was conducted in Nova Scotia including: making site visits, and conducting interviews

July 2011  Field work was conducted in British Columbia including: attending the British Columbia Food Systems Network provincial gathering, facilitating the popular education workshop, making site visits, and conducting interviews

August 2011  The second issue of the Transformative Food Politics newsletter was published

September 2011 – June 2013  The author was part of a team that conducted a developmental evaluation of Sustain Ontario

November 2011  The third issue of the Transformative Food Politics newsletter was published

May 2012  A panel discussion was organized with the primary partners to reflect on the research findings at the CAFS/ACÉA assembly in Waterloo, Ontario

November 2012  The final research report was published and launched at the Seventh National Food Assembly (hosted by FSC/SAC) in partnership with the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement Social Science and Humanities Research Council Partnership Project

May 2013  Further field work was conducted in Nova Scotia at the Nova Scotia Food Security Gathering where the popular education workshops were facilitated; subsequently a fourth and final issue of the Transformative Food Politics Newsletter was published

**Case studies and research partners**

The research design process began by identifying which provincial food networks would be included in the case studies. The networks were selected based on my own experiences and preexisting relationships, consultation with others active in the provincial networks, as well as an effort to represent a range of geographies and degrees of food network maturity. I eventually chose four case study provinces in attempts to get a broad sample (Figure 1.1 in *Chapter 1*).
provides a visual representation of the four case study provinces). First, British Columbia, a coastal, mountainous province was chosen as one of Canada’s oldest provincial-level networks. Second, Manitoba is located in the Canadian prairies and the network coalesced more recently around collaborative efforts to establish a provincial-level food charter. Third, Ontario is heavily populated in the south, with its productive agricultural land facing development pressure, while the north of the province is sparsely populated and unsuitable for most agriculture. AFI{s in Ontario have a long history of innovation and leadership but it was not until quite recently that a provincial-level network was established. Fourth, Nova Scotia is a small coastal province with a provincial network that has been closely connected to public health, the university and participatory research initiatives.

I held initial consultations with the representatives from the PNO{s} in each of the case study provinces to discuss the overall project and proposed research plan. As the discussions developed, these representatives became partners in an ongoing dialogue about the research process, the methods, and the eventual findings. The four PNO{s} were: the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN); Food Matters Manitoba (FMM); Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain Ontario); and, the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) (see Table 3.2 for a list of the research partners associated with each PNO and province; Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 provides a visual representation and brief description of the four PNO{s}). As partners, the representatives committed to supporting the research process, being involved in ongoing communication, facilitating contacts with provincial AFI{s}, participating in ongoing consultation, providing feedback, and being part of other research related activities.
Table 3.2: Representatives associated with each provincial network organization and province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PNO</th>
<th>Primary Partners $^4, ^5$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN) | • Dayna Chapman, BCFSN Chair, Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agriculture Society  
• Arzeena Hamir, Past BCFSN Co-Chair; Richmond Food Security Society Coordinator  
• Abra Brynne, Past BCFSN Communications Coordinator and Cofounder  
• Jen Cody, Past BCFSN Chair and Cofounder |
| Food Matters Manitoba (FMM) | • Kreesta Doucette, FMM Executive Director (maternity leave 2012-2013)  
• Stefan Epp-Koop, FMM Acting Executive Director; Past FMM Community Food Assessment and Evaluation Coordinator |
| Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain Ontario) | • Brendan McKay, Sustain Ontario Interim Director, 2013-2014  
• Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker, Sustain Ontario Director, on maternity leave (2013-2014)  
• Dr. Lauren Baker, Sustain Ontario Past Director; Toronto Food Policy Council Coordinator |
| Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) | • Dr. Patty Williams, NSFSN Cofounder and Past Chair; Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Policy Change, Department of Applied Human Nutrition; Director, FoodARC (Formerly the Participatory Action Research and Training Center on Food Security), Mount Saint Vincent University  
• Marla MacLeod, NSFSN Co-Chair; Ecology Action Centre, Food Connections Project Coordinator  
• Darren Leyte, NSFSN Co-Chair; Health Canada Regional Food Liaison Officer |

$^4$ During the course of the research a number of the original partners left their positions with the PNO. In all of these cases, the original partners committed to stay connected to the project and the individuals that replaced them agreed to assume their commitments and responsibilities.

$^5$ For partners who are not employed full time by the network organization (i.e. they volunteer or work part-time), other relevant affiliations are listed.
In the spring of 2009, I worked closely with Dr. Sarah Wakefield to develop a grant proposal to support this research that was submitted to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). As part of preparing the proposal I was in close contact with all the partners who agreed to be collaborators. The funds from the four-year grant, which we received in April 2010, became an important part of the research, shaping my ability to gather data (through supporting travel and accommodations) and to support the research partners in various ways. For example, recognizing the limited resources available to the AFIs and PNOs, we provided honorariums to the participating organizations in recognition of the unpaid time they committed to the project. Beyond financial compensation for partners’ time, we also committed funds towards disseminating and sharing the research results with the participants in a usable format.

I designed the research process to triangulate data using a number of primary methods to examine the provincial food networks (Mathison 1988). Each method was chosen to explore the network from a different perspective and was intended to work in relationship to the others. In the following subsections, I outline the different interrelated methods employed throughout this study and describe how the data has been used in the following chapters.

The network survey

After an initial conversation with the partners and a scan of the scholarly and popular literature, I found many different (and often conflicting) ideas about which groups were included as part of food networks, the kinds of work they were doing, and what brought the actors

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6 Due to a transition of the board’s chair, the BCFSN was not part of the original grant proposal.
together. There was also little consensus about the frames used to describe the networks and even how to bound them for the purposes of study. From this initial exploration, I decided to collect some basic information about each provincial network and the participating AFIs. With respect to decisions about which organizations to include/exclude from the network survey, I used a realist strategy, allowing respondents to self-define whether their organization was part of the network. This is distinct from a nominalist approach, where the network would be pre-defined by a particular perception and constructed with regard to specific theoretical interests (Knoke and Kuklinski 1982: 22-25). Representatives from all organizations and groups working on food related issues in the case study provinces were invited to participate. The invitations requested the participation of one senior staff or volunteer to represent the organization. The survey’s objective was to gain a general overview of the kinds of work happening among AFIs, to gather information about the relationships between actors, and to understand some of the general structures and relations within the networks.

The research partners all played an important role in designing the survey and took responsibility for promoting it through their provincial network listservs. A draft of the survey was sent to the research partners for feedback on the particular language and focus of the questions. Some of the partners suggested additional questions that would provide them with useful information. Once final changes and additions were made, I created the online survey using LimeSurvey, an open source survey software tool. The survey was open for participants to complete from September to November 2010 (see Appendix A Network Survey). Upon closing

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7 In all the case study provinces the listservs are open to the general public and contain a wide range of individual and organizational subscribers from multiple sectors.
(and cleanup of the raw data\textsuperscript{8}), the survey had been completed by 207 food-related organizations across the country, as follows: British Columbia (n=62), Manitoba (n=22), Ontario (n=92) and Nova Scotia (n=31).

The survey collected a range of information, and the different types of data were analyzed in three ways. First, quantitative survey responses were downloaded into SPSS and synthesized to produce a series of summary statistics, graphs and tables to illustrate the data trends\textsuperscript{9} (these results are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Second, qualitative survey responses were analyzed and organized into emergent categories based on commonalities between the responses. This data is presented in the form of specific quotes and in some cases has been translated into summary tables (these results are presented in Chapters 4 to 7). Third, the survey asked respondents to list the organizations or groups they had been involved with most frequently and that they believed were most valuable to their organization for addressing food-related issues. The responses were recorded in four categories (local, provincial, national and global) but were merged into three categories (local/provincial, national, global) when it became apparent that many respondents had interpreted the local and provincial categories as interchangeable and overlapping. These results were used to analyze levels of centrality within each network and to identify which actors held more power through their ability to control information flow (these results are presented in Chapter 5).

\textsuperscript{8} Since not all respondents answered every question, missing values were omitted leaving each question with slightly different response rates. If multiple individuals from the same organization submitted surveys, the data from the most senior staff person was used and the others were omitted.

\textsuperscript{9} Evan Castel, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Geography and Program in Planning at the University of Toronto assisted with this quantitative analysis.
**Selecting AFIs for further study**

In addition to an in-depth study of the PNOs, I included approximately five organizations from each case study province in the research. The purpose was to engage in a deeper analysis of the networks and the different relationships between AFIs, as well as to explore the perceptions of the PNOs among member AFIs. To select which AFIs would be chosen for further study, I used the centrality findings derived from the survey to identify organizations with strong and weak ties to the PNOs. I also met with each of the research partners to discuss which AFIs should be included in the study. Ultimately, we selected AFIs that were involved in work beyond administering single-issue or front-line programs. In other words, the focus was on organizations that were mandated to bring together groups of individuals and other organizations to build collaboration using a food system approach (e.g., an organizations working with farmer’s issues vs. a specific farm or retail venue). Other factors that were part of the selection criteria included a range of geographic locations, organizational foci, and size (see Table 3.3 for a complete list of the organizations selected; Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 provides a visual representation and description of the AFIs that participated in the research). The sample study population was not intended to be representative of all individuals involved in food related efforts, but we did attempt to capture a wide representation of collaborative initiatives (i.e. groups of people working together through organizational structures).

**Collecting background information**

Before beginning the interviews and site visits, I collected key documents from the PNOs and the selected AFIs to understanding the provincial contexts, the history of each organization, and the kinds of work occurring in each province. The documents I reviewed included websites, annual reports, publicity materials (e.g., brochures, newsletters), and published documents (e.g.,
reports, position papers, evaluations). Using this information I developed profiles for each AFI that included their organizational structure and history, a list of the kinds of initiatives being implemented, and additional information provided in the survey (selections from these profiles are presented in Chapter 4).

Table 3.3: Alternative food initiatives in each province participating in in-depth interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Selected Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>LifeCycles, Farm Folk City Folk, Vancouver Coastal Health, Healthy Eating/Active Living, North Okanagan Food Action Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>Northern Healthy Food Initiative, North End Food Security Network, Organic Council of Manitoba, Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance, Harvest Moon, Farmers’ Market Association of Manitoba Coop Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Just Food, FarmStart, FoodShed Project, Eat Local Sudbury Inc., Waterloo Region Food System Round Table, Food Connections Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of a background analysis in May 2010, I organized a roundtable dialogue that brought together a number of provincial and national network representatives in Montreal, Quebec as part of the CAFS/ACÉA national assembly. The dialogue took the form of a double session (three hours) and included representatives from Growing Food Security in Alberta (Alberta’s PNO), Sustain Ontario, Equiterre (a provincial level organization in Quebec involved...
in food-related issues), the NSFSN, and FSC/SAC (a national level food movement organization). Representatives from the BCFSN and FMM were invited, but were unable to attend due to financial limitations (we did not receive the grant funding until well after the session was planned). While data was collected from this dialogue, the roundtable was also an opportunity to engage the partners and other AFIs in the research process. I was able to articulate the ideas guiding the research and the PNOs were able to respond and reflect on their practice beyond the provincial context.

**Site visits and interviews**

Following the survey, selecting the AFIs and the collection of background information, I organized site visits to each of the four provinces. During the site visits I conducted a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the PNOs and the AFIs. I also visited selected projects and attended provincial network gatherings (see Figure 3.1). Beyond simply observing how AFIs worked and interacted with each other, I was able to be a part of the interactions through conversations, sharing information, and volunteer support. Having the opportunity to visit the organizations directly and build relationships across geographies enabled a mutual exchange where I could ask probing questions and share my knowledge and experiences from meeting with other AFIs around the country.

Due to the busy schedules of all those involved, I made an effort to support the PNOs
whenever possible. For example, in Manitoba I gave presentations at the provincial gathering to fill thematic gaps in the program, and in Ontario I facilitated the concluding plenary at the provincial gathering. In most cases, this work complimented the research process by providing additional data and supporting the work of the networks. Taking on these extra tasks, I was able to share my personal experiences (e.g. my work at The Stop, farming, strategic planning) to support the research process. These moments reinforced the blurring of boundaries between my role as insider and outsider in the communities of study.

During the site visits I realized that I was unable to meet with as many AFIIs as I had originally intended. For example, I visited Manitoba in February, which made it difficult to travel beyond Winnipeg due to accessibility and safety of roads. Some Northern communities were inaccessible in the winter due to weather conditions while many agricultural projects were not in operation while I was there. I visited British Columbia for under two weeks in the summer and had hoped to travel to a number of communities. I quickly realized that a kilometre through mountainous west coast terrain was much different than a kilometre along flat highway in Southern Ontario. Further, I had to coordinate travel for the site visits with my personal obligations such as parenting my two young children, teaching, and budgetary considerations. This was another indication of the way my involvement in different networks overlapped to impact the research process.

The research participants also faced a number of limitations to participation such as availability and scheduling. This was especially difficult in cases where AFI representatives were volunteers and had limited time to meet. In some cases, my preexisting relationships helped when scheduling meetings. For example, participants often commented on their limited time to meet face-to-face, but agreed to meet due to my involvement in food work and/or my support
from the PNOs. Because of my pre-existing connections to the participants (direct and indirect), most of the interviews functioned as a space for data collection and reflection, but also information exchange, problem solving around specific challenges, and in some cases strategic planning. During most of the interviews, it took very little effort to elicit information from the participants. Most AFI representatives were extremely forthcoming and honest, which was evident in the high number of “off record” comments that were made throughout the discussions. On most occasions, after the interviews had finished, participants commented that they rarely had time for these types of conversations and deeply appreciated the reflection process and sharing of information.

When meeting with the AFIs and PNOs, I scheduled interviews with the most senior staff or volunteer available. Originally, the interviews were intended to be one-on-one, but after conducting the pilot interview with Sustain Ontario, which included the research partner and an advisory council member, it became clear that interviews with multiple people resulted in a more rich and reflective conversation. As a result of this experience, I invited additional organizational representatives to participate in the discussions. In each interview, we discussed personal motivations and perspectives about food system challenges and solutions, specific approaches of the organization and the broader network, and the relationships within each provincial network (see Appendix B Interview Guides). The interviews were also used to ask follow-up questions that arose from the survey data and archival analysis. In some cases, I showed the initial survey data to participants as part of the conversation. Many of the participants expressed that the interviews were a valuable opportunity to reflect on their own practice with other staff members and myself as an external facilitator.
The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Reading through the transcripts, I coded them using key themes that emerged from the literature, theory and directly from the content of the interviews. The interviews appear as part of my commentary, summary discussions and specific quotes. During the site visits discussions and observations were documented through recordings, photography and field notes. The specific information gathered from the site visits appears as part of my commentary and in some cases is presented as direct quotes.

*Popular education workshops*

In order to engage a broader group of people in discussion around the network activities, I developed a popular education workshop that was held in conjunction with the provincial gatherings (see Figure 3.2). The concept of popular education was developed in Latin America in the 1960s and was translated through the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2001 [1970]). As a practice, popular education “promotes democratic practice through teaching/learning, processes that are collective, critical, systematic, participatory, and creative. Motivated by principles of equity and justice, it integrates research, learning and organizing for social change” (Barndt 2002: 68). Using popular education entails beginning from an individual’s personal experiences and sharing narratives with others to create space for reflection and move towards a critical decoding of the world (Arnold et al. 1991). As a research method, popular education is well paired with CBR since it is a process of co-creating knowledge based on the experiences of participants in relation to the
socio-political context. Through a series of collaborative and reflexive activities, ideas are recorded as data for analysis. Further, the process becomes a part of the group’s collective experience and a contribution towards future strategic action.

I conducted popular workshops in all of the four case study provinces in the form of participant-driven, interactive, activity-based workshops. The workshops were designed to explore the different perspectives around challenges and opportunities for food system transformation within each provincial network. The workshops explored participant’s understanding and articulation of a transformative food politics and reflected on current network activities and strategies. Workshop participants represented a broad sample of individuals involved in each provincial network and were open to all participants who had registered for the provincial gathering (see Appendix C Popular Education Workshop Descriptions and Appendix D Popular Education Workshop).

During the workshops, participants worked in small groups to create a picture of how community food security (CFS) affected their communities using a What’s Happening Chart (see Figure 3.3 and 3.4): First, participants discussed things that make it more difficult to establish CFS in their communities, and second, participants

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10 Chris Cavanagh of Toronto’s Catalyst Centre, a popular education worker co-op, supported me in the design of the workshop (www.catalystcentrec.ca).

11 During the workshops, the term Community Food Security was described as “a situation 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.”
discussed ways they are working to increase CFS. Ideas were posted on the chart in five areas: social justice, ecological sustainability, community health, democracy, and “other”; as well as looking at three different levels where people are affected: Local/Provincial, National, and Global.

### Figure 3.4: Popular Education Workshop Chart

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globally</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally/Provincially</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The charts were an integral part of understanding the general issues and activities in each province. Using coloured pieces of paper to post ideas on the chart, the group produced a multi-layered, textual document that was used for analysis (see Figure 3.5). The workshop concluded with a discussion of the overall observations and by asking participants to point out one action or next step that they felt was a priority – either something they would do themselves or that they would recommend to the PNO. The charts presented a visual representation of the discussions. After the coloured papers were posted on the charts, the group was able to observe which categories were more active (e.g. local/health) and which were less active (e.g. global/democracy).
Following the workshop, the information from the chart was transferred to a word processing document for further analysis (the charts are presented in Chapter 5). Summaries of the charts were emailed to all participants who signed up to receive them.

The popular education workshops provided a space for connecting, sharing, reflecting, and strategizing about the work between organizations and individuals in the provincial networks. On the feedback forms from the workshops, many comments pointed to the value of the interactive process and the opportunity to reflect on current practices and develop strategies for future action.

**Disseminating the research**

Besides the completion of this dissertation for the requirements for my degree of doctor of philosophy, the research has been disseminated through the academic fields of food studies, environmental studies, and geography and directly to the AFIs and provincial networks. The dissemination of the research began during the interviews with PNOs and AFIs. The interviews, which functioned as interactive discussions included sharing the initial survey results in order to elicit participants’ reflections. I created summaries for each of the PNOs that included specific data from the survey and the interviews that contained targeted feedback. After the each of the provincial site visits, I published an eight-page newsletter that contained summaries of the popular education workshops, project updates, photos, and data from the survey relevant to the particular province. Newsletters were also printed in full colour and shared with the research partners and within the networks. The newsletters received extremely positive feedback. For example, one participant representing a large alliance of cooperatives sent the newsletter to his
network along with a note reading, “It’s a very interesting read and highly democratic in a participatory way.”

The research has been disseminated in leading environmental and geography journals (e.g., Levkoe 2011a; Levkoe and Wakefield 2011; Levkoe and Wakefield 2013). The content of these publications has been significantly reworked and appears within the chapters of this dissertation. I have disseminated this research through multiple academic and public presentations at conferences, directly to AFIs and through my own teaching. The research findings have also been disseminated in collaboration with the work of other academics and community activists by publishing articles in popular books (e.g., Levkoe and Stephens 2009; Levkoe and Dávila 2012), non-academic journals (e.g., Levkoe and Schiff 2013), and magazines (e.g., Levkoe 2011b).

My research has also aimed to support the work of the organizations involved in the food networks. As part of a CBR approach, I created opportunities to present the research findings in collaboration with the research partners along with space for collective reflection and further knowledge generation. For example, I organized a roundtable dialogue that brought together a number of provincial and national network representatives in Montreal, Quebec as part of the 2010 CAFS/ACÉA national assembly. While this session gathered import information, the presentations were an opportunity to share knowledge between AFIs and to a broader audience. Once the final data had been gathered and analyzed, a similar roundtable session was held to reflect on the data at the 2012 CAFS/AECA national assembly. I also organized sessions at non-academic conferences, also in coordination with the research partners, to share the research findings with the broader public. For example at the 2011 Bring Food Home conference in Ontario, I organized a session that brought together provincial and national networking
organizations to discuss strategies for building strong and effective networks. Various quotes from this session are incorporated into this dissertation (including the quote leading chapter).

Once the survey and interviews had been completed, I published a major research report that contained a summary of the data, and a historical narrative of the provincial food networks. The report was originally circulated to the four primary research partners in preparation for a roundtable discussion at the 2012 CAFS/ACÉA assembly. In the session each of the partners were given a series of guiding questions and had an opportunity to reflect on the data and discuss the implications for further study. This session was recorded and some of the comments and reflections appeared in the final report (as a discussion section) and in this dissertation. The final report was launched at the Seventh National Food Assembly in Edmonton, Alberta in 2012 and subsequently distributed (in print and on the websites of the PNOs in the case study provinces) as a resource for the networks.

Discussion

The dual goals of my research are to investigate how AFIs in Canada are mobilizing around food-related issues and to support the provincial food networks through a collaborative dialogue about food system transformation. I began this chapter by positioning my research as part of a tradition of scholars that have attempted to conduct rigorous and relevant research while supporting the efforts of community groups and broader social change efforts (e.g., Fuller and Kitchin 2004; Beavington and Dixon 2005; Sandburg 2007; Wakefield 2007; Friedland 2008). I have presented the research process as a community-based approach and discussed my

12 Two research assistants (Melissa Bebee and Evan Castel) and Dr. Sarah Wakefield supported the production of the report.
experiences of blurring the boundaries of being either “inside” or “outside” the communities of study. I have also maintained that when done well, CBR can be a useful approach to research because it increases the quality and validity of the research results and facilitates progressive social change. The survey, site visits, interviews and popular education workshops all produced valuable and relevant information and provided important opportunities for AFIs to reflect on their work and strategize for future actions. Further, producing the summary documents for the PNOs, the newsletters, a final report, organizing the two roundtable sessions at the CAFS/ACÉA national assembly, as well as other events provided opportunities for the communities of study to take full advantage of the research findings. In turn, the regular feedback that I received from the participants during the research process contributed to the overall design of the research and the final results.

In my experience, the insider-outsider dichotomy (Acker 2000) is neither accurate nor a helpful way to understand my positionality in relation to the research. Conceptualized as assemblages, each of the different networks that I am embedded within (from the personal to the professional) could be understood as a complex configuration that is itself nested within a series of extended configurations. Further, using an assemblage lens to understand a researcher’s positionality as nested in multiple intersecting networks highlights the relations of exteriority (as described in Chapter 2; and in De Landa 2006), where a researcher is part of multiple assemblages and exhibits different capacities depending on the particular circumstance.

Recognizing that researchers are themselves involved in multiple networks, some as part of the research and others external to it, demands a high degree of reflexivity about ones actual position. This kind of reflexivity is an important part of CBR since it encourages problematizing the insider-outsider dichotomy.
In this research I have *navigated the spaces between* (Dwyer and Buckle 2009) my different experiences, which overlap with those of others. Throughout the process of conceptualizing, designing and conducting this research, I have been nested in a variety of different (and overlapping) networks where identities, ideals and professional obligations intersect. Thinking about my role as a researcher beyond an inside-outside dichotomy has enabled me to negotiate multiple subject positions. I have navigated the boundaries between my identity as a researcher, student, activist, worker, teacher, volunteer, father, partner, friend and community member, which were often fluid and interdependent. Engaging and naming these different roles foregrounded my positionality, which was integrally linked to the data produced. The ways that the research was designed, the kinds of relationships I created with the research participants, and the way the data was collected and expressed were deeply influenced by my positionality. In many cases my pre-existing relationships with the participants and my previous experiences were important contributions to the success of this research. Instead of attempting to preform the role of an objective researcher detached from the participants, I drew heavily on varied experiences to build relationships with the communities of study. This helped me to avoid some of the critiques of CBR research and to earn the trust and connect with the struggles of the communities of study (Israel et al. 1998). However, as discussed previously, I am also embedded in various gender, class and cultural dynamics that also impacted my relationships with the participants in unknown and unexpected ways.

In this research, I have been explicit about my solidarity with the networks under study, but have also attempted to offer constructive critique as part of a reflexive practice. This was not always an easy process, as some critiques caused disagreements and resulted in difficult discussions. Since many of the research partners were also friends, at times it was difficult to give and/or receive critical feedback. Despite my expressed solidarity with the research partners,
I also recognized that some degree of detachment was necessary to maintain a critical edge and provide research that was useful. Presenting myself as a researcher that is part of the food networks, yet not directly accountable to any one organization, I was often perceived as a colleague and a somewhat objective researcher removed from the day-to-day activities. For example, the summary data I prepared for the PNOs was often quite critical and at times, difficult to receive. Nevertheless, the partners and participants were generally very appreciative of the feedback.

Another reflection about the research process is the way that the institutional context in which the research was conducted played an important part in shaping the overall process and its outcomes. For example, the funding from the SSHRC grant and the institutional support from the University of Toronto enhanced my ability to use a CBR approach. The resources I was able to mobilize and share played an important role in overcoming many of the concerns mentioned in the critiques of CBR such as researchers taking advantage of participants (Israel et al. 1998). My physical presence and ability to participate in the provincial gatherings, to meet face-to-face for the interviews, and to visit AFIs contributed to building stronger relationships among the networks. Having access to a sizable budget enabled me to bring the research partners together, to disseminate the research to non-academic audiences, and to support the community partners and research participants. However, the funding also presented some challenges such as the imposed time constraints of the grant’s spending cycles and limitations of what the money could be spent on (e.g. we were only able to provide small stipends to the research participants as opposed to a fair wage for their time investment).

CBR takes a significant investment of time and energy to prepare and negotiate. Despite my attempts, the research was not entirely community-driven since it was bounded by the
requirement of my graduate program and the protocols of the SSHRC grant. Being upfront with the research partners about these realities from the beginning was an important part of inviting organizations to participate. Working within the constraints of the graduate program, personal limitations and the realities of the community partners, I made efforts to be as collaborative as possible. Constant communication, relationship building and self-reflection were an important part of the process. Further, soliciting feedback for decisions and outcomes along the way (e.g. about the research process, who to interview, the survey drafts, feedback on the initial results, etc.) was also a key part of the process.

Conclusion

Using a participatory, community-based approach, all those involved have become additional nodes in an ever-expanding community of practice that constitutes the food networks. In my research, I have used multiple methods within a CBR framework to interrogate the research questions. Triangulating different methods has enhanced the validity and usefulness of the data by providing different perspectives on the research questions and allowing multiple opportunities for feedback from community partners, colleagues and the general public – all of which have been integral to the reflections, analysis and arguments presented in this dissertation. Beyond the formal data collected (e.g., from the survey, interviews, and field notes) my personal experience has been an integral part of the evidence that constitutes this dissertation. My participation in the provincial gatherings, facilitating the workshops, visiting the projects and participating in conversations provided insight into the work of AFIs, PNOs and the networks more generally. Beyond the production of this dissertation, publications in scholarly journals and presentations at academic conferences, the research results have provided input into long-term strategies for network builders.
In this chapter, I have used my own experiences to suggest that as researchers we all navigate the spaces between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Regardless of whether or not it is articulated, we are more than just professional scholars. As people with multilayered identities we engage a range of spaces including our homes, community centers, markets, public parks, gardens and, of course, the university. It is impossible to draw a fixed line between one’s personal identity and professional life. In each part of our lives we play multiple roles that cannot be switched on and off at a particular moment. In this sense, I have argued that identity is always hybrid and consists of a wide-range of characteristics at any given moment. Reflecting on my research experience, there is no clear distinction between my role as a community member and as a university-based scholar. Instead I have chosen to embrace the messiness of the spaces between.
Chapter 4
The Evolution of the Provincial Food Networks

Networks, like webs, are created by spiders and we are all spiders creating networks. First you grab onto something and you swing out into the unknown on a thread until you find something else to grab onto. You connect with it and then climb back up to where you started and do it again. Then you move across to those two nodes to make a connection. You keep repeating this process until there is a whole web. Now, there are two things that are really important. One is that the filament, the silk that the spider spins comes out of her gut. The other is that it is stronger than steel. The strength of the network is the strength of the links that we are building today and yesterday and last week and next month, with each other, both among and between all the different things we are doing. All of which, together, create that wonderful and beautiful mosaic that are our food movement.
~ Cathleen Kneen, Past Chair of Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (from Building Strong and Effective Networks, a session at the Bring Food Home Conference, Peterborough Ontario, October 28, 2011)

The rise of alternative food initiatives (AFI) in number and scope reflects increasing public concerns about the corporate led industrial food system. While some have argued that these interests are simply a passing fad (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012) or that much of this activity focuses on isolated food issues (Fairbairn 2011; Sharzer 2012), there is emerging evidence that collaborative and sustained attention to the food system has deep historical roots. Literature coming from the United States has made a convincing argument that social mobilization around food constitutes the emergence of a broader movement (Allen 2004; Katz 2006; Belasco 2007; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Winne 2010; Lappe et al. 2011). Likewise, there has been significant writing about global food movements and their impact on policy and practice (Desmarais 2007; McMichael 2008; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009; Wittman et al. 2010; Holt-Giménez 2011). In Canada, there has been some literature focusing on specific food initiatives (see for example Kirbyson 2005; CCA 2009; Elton 2010; Johnson 2010; Wittman et al. 2011), but there has been little written on broader
collaborations (exceptions include Wekerle 2006; Miller 2008; Kneen 2011). This dearth of literature may imply that there has been little collaborative activity taking place in Canada to address the food system. However, as I empirically document in this dissertation, this is not the case.

In this chapter I introduce the four case study provinces used throughout this dissertation – British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia – and explore the historical development of AFI collaboration that takes a comprehensive and broad approach to issues within the food system. I focus on the Provincial Network Organizations (PNOs) that have evolved in the four case study provinces and address the intersecting temporal and spatial collaborations at broader scales. In telling these stories I acknowledge that there have been many other local, regional and provincial level networks that pre-date and/or exist parallel to the four PNOs. I have chosen to focus on the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN), Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain Ontario), and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) as case-studies that illustrate efforts to build networks across sectors, scales and geographies and to transform the food system. These four case studies were also chosen to represent a range of geographies and degrees of food network maturity (as described in Chapter 3). In this chapter, I focus on the key moments that led to the establishment of each of the four PNOs. Further, I highlight the way the provincial networks have been constituted by (historically and geographically) contextualized and overlapping networks of actors and spaces (i.e. assemblages).
Methods

This chapter draws on information collected from the network survey and the semi-structured in-depth interviews to construct an historical and geographical narrative for each of the provincial networks. Additional interviews with key individuals were also conducted in order to supplement the histories of provincial collaboration\(^{13}\). Melissa Bebee, (a research assistant hired to assist with the SHHRC grant from 2011-2012) conducted eight of the ten additional interviews used in this chapter. These interviews were guided by an interview script I developed that asked specific questions about the PNO’s history. In telling their stories, some of the informants agreed to be identified by name in places where they expressed personal opinions. Background materials were also used to gather specific information about the network’s history. Specifically, I drew on organizational websites, annual reports, meeting minutes, project and event evaluations and some unpublished material. Each of the network’s stories was sent back to the informants and changes were made based on their feedback. In some case the changes were significant and further research was required. The conflicting narratives speak to the contested nature of history but also to the way that the networks (and PNOs) as assemblages have been constituted by the interactions of multiple AFIs in relation to external political and social conditions.

The Evolution of the Provincial Food Networks\(^{14}\)

Canada has a rich tradition of collective action for social change initiated by food-related

\(^{13}\) Beyond the PNOs and AFIs already part of the study (see Table 3.2 and 3.3 in Chapter 3 for a complete list of these organizations), additional interviews to collect contextual narratives were held with representatives from Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (National), the Metcalf Foundation (Ontario), and Farms at Work (Ontario).

\(^{14}\) Parts of this this section have been adapted from: Levkoe C., Bebee, M., Castel, E., and Wakefield, S. 2012. Propagating the food movement: provincial networks and social mobilization in Canada.
actors. Prior to the 1970s, many food-related initiatives were focused on specific sectors and interest such as fishing, farming, health, poverty, labour, Indigenous peoples, and the environment. Due in part to Canada’s large geographic size, different languages spoken, and a lack of communication technologies, unified action around the food system was complicated (Rideout et al. 2007; Koc et al. 2008). Further, navigating the state’s political system was challenging due to the fragmentation of food related jurisdiction. For example, the federal government in Canada has jurisdiction over many social welfare programs, and a national health care plan, while the provincial jurisdiction administrates most food-related departments such as health care, agriculture, education, labour, and some social services. Municipal governments are responsible for public health (including food inspection and health education), water supply, urban and regional planning, housing, recreation, transportation, and some social. Each of these government responsibilities weigh into decision making in the food system about how food is produced, processed, distributed, accessed, consumed and disposed of, as well as the impacts of all of these factors on our health and the environment (MacRae 2011). This fragmented approach to food in Canada “hinders rational analysis of problems and the development of effective policy” (Rideout et al. 2007: 570). The four PNOs evolved amidst these realities.

In Canada, the first large scale, comprehensive mobilization focusing on food system issues began in the late 1970s. Adopting the name the People’s Food Commission (PFC), the collaborative effort developed in direct response to the early impacts of neoliberal restructuring, including rising inflation and unemployment, increasing housing prices, and declining working conditions in food and farming industries (People’s Food Commission 1980). In response to increasing food prices at the time, the federal government argued that consumers were being unfairly penalized, effectively driving a stake between producers and consumers. Beginning in 1977, the PFC brought together thousands of diverse grassroots actors from across the country to
initiate a comprehensive discussion about the broader food system. Participants included a range of individuals and organizations such as the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Farmers Union, the Canadian Union of Students, the YWCA of Canada, and the National Indian Brotherhood, along with other national and provincial organizations. Unlike the Federal government’s hierarchical and invitation-only Royal Commissions, the PFC had minimal funding and was decentralized with only one national staff coordinator (Miller 2006). Participation packages were made available that contained instructions as well as suggestions about community research methods and media outreach. Regional organizing groups worked independently to bring participants together as part of the broader PFC process.

Through informal hearings and creative presentations, the objective of the PFC was to document a wide range of challenges and opportunities with the goal to transform the food system. Presenters made deputations based on personal and professional experience using slides, songs, puppet shows, and informal discussions. They addressed the deteriorating economic and social conditions with respect to the food system and suggested possible actions that could be taken. Their final publication, a report entitled *The Land of Milk and Money*, was based on the assumption that “everyday experience is a valuable source of information, and that people’s stories about how things work and fit together have an important validity” (People’s Food Commission 1980: 7). The PFC report concluded, “behind the rise and fall of food prices, there were a handful of corporations who controlled and profited from the food system” (People’s Food Commission 1980: 81).

Over four years, the PFC mobilized thousands of people and groups from across the country to articulate their concerns and suggestions around ways to transform the food system. While the process generated significant energy and interest, a lack of resources limited the ability
of the PFC to move forward. Further, there was little political will to address the issues brought up in the final report (Miller 2008). However, the ideas and inspirations that were established throughout the PFC have continued to permeate mobilization around the food system in Canada. This is evidenced by the flow of people and perspectives that were politicized by the PFC and are active leaders in the provincial networks today. For example, for Cathleen Kneen, then a sheep farmer in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, the PFC became an entry point and an inspiration to continue organizing around food system issues. Following the PFC, Kneen co-founded the Ram’s Horn with her partner, and went on to play a central role in the establishment of the Toronto Food Policy Council, the BCFSN, as well as the national networking organization Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (FSC/SAC). Upon reflection, Kneen recounts, “The PFC was not a failure, but sowed the seeds for a broader analysis of the whole food system. It also brought people together who have continued to be in one another’s orbit over the following decades.” Further, the critical and contextualized perspectives put forth by the PFC about corporate control of the food system, the difficulty for food producers to earn a living, and the impact of poverty on food security have been adopted by many AFIs I spoke to as part of this research.

By the late 1990s, there were myriad individuals and organizations with diverse interests and goals working on food system issues in Canada. During this time period, changes in communication technologies radically shifted the ways that social movements were organizing. For example, Jeff Juris (2008) has studied the development networks among global justice

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15 The Ram’s Horn newsletter is published monthly to provide analysis of developments in the food system. The Ram’s Horn was established in 1980 to help sheep farmers understand the broader food system and has since gained popularity around the world.
movements during this period. He writes, “By enhancing the speed, flexibility, and global reach of communication flows, computer networks provide the technological infrastructure for the operation of contemporary transnational social movements” (Juris 2008: 12). More generally, Manuel Castells (1997) has identified a “networking, decentered form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination of the information society (Castells 1997: 362, see also Castells 2012) (I also discuss the use of technology in the provincial food networks in Chapter 6). At a local level, mobilization around food issues included small businesses (e.g. small scale and artisanal processors, grocers, cooperatives), rural and urban farms, regional health authorities, food policy councils, and other local food coalitions. At the provincial level, the focus of this research, the mobilization of local actors and organizations into regional alliances is emblematic of this period. In the four sub-sections below, I outline the birth stories of the four provincial networks and the PNOs. To contextualize the case studies, Table 4.1 presents a comparison of some food-related information from each of the four provinces. For example, while food bank use has increased in all provinces since 2008, Manitoba has seen the most dramatic rise during this time period. Further, obesity rates in British Columbia are much lower than the other three provinces. These statistics provide some insight into the province’s most pressing problems in relation to food. Figures 4.1a and 4.1b provide an overview of the key moments of the provincial food networks, the PNOs and the national food networks discussed in this chapter.
Table 4.1: Selected food related information by province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Manitoba</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Nova Scotia</th>
<th>Canada</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population in thousands (% of total)</td>
<td>4,622.6 (13.3%)</td>
<td>1,260 (3.6%)</td>
<td>13,505.9 (38.7%)</td>
<td>948.7 (2.7%)</td>
<td>34,880.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household food insecurity</td>
<td>11% (15.3%)</td>
<td>11.8% (19%)</td>
<td>11.9% (16.4%)</td>
<td>17.1% (23%)</td>
<td>12.3% (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(proportion of children who lived in food insecure households)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Food bank use - total assisted</td>
<td>96,150 (+23.1%)</td>
<td>63,482 (+56.9%)</td>
<td>412,998 (+31.4%)</td>
<td>23,561 (+39.3%)</td>
<td>882,118 (+30.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% change 2008-2012)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Income-related household food insecurity as % of population</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm families average net operating income</td>
<td>$4,586</td>
<td>$28,983</td>
<td>$14,661</td>
<td>$18,217</td>
<td>$22,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of farms (% change 2001-2006)</td>
<td>19,844 (-2.2%)</td>
<td>19,054 (-9.6%)</td>
<td>57,211 (-4.2%)</td>
<td>3,795 (-3.3%)</td>
<td>229,373 (-7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit and vegetable consumption as % of population eating ≥ 5 per day</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of obesity as % of population</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*g* Statistics Canada. 2008. Fruit and vegetable consumption, 5 times or more per day, by age group and sex. Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 105-0501 and Catalogue no. 82-221-X. Available at: [http://www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca).

Figure 4.1a: Key moments
(This figure was created in collaboration with Melissa Bebee)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>NATIONAL</th>
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| 2001 First Assembly: Civil Society Input for Food Security in Canada  
Cross-provincial civil society gathering in Toronto, Ontario to contribute to the national response to the World Food Summit - Five Years Later, the group resolved to establish a national food security network. |
| 2004 Growing Together: 2nd National Assembly  
National gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba agreed to establish an organization to advocate and speak on food security issues. |
| 2006 3rd National Assembly  
National gathering in Waterloo, Ontario ratified the Food Secure Canada/Secure Alimentaire Canada with an action agenda based on four focus areas: research and policy development; strategic alliances and capacity building; education and outreach; advocacy. |
| 2006 Bridging Borders Towards Food Security - 4th National Assembly  
National gathering in Vancouver, British Columbia held its annual general meeting of newly incorporated FSC-SC. |
| 2006 Canadian Association for Food Studies  
Established as a national organization to connect academic and professional researchers to share interdisciplinary information and enhance the evidence base for food systems work. |
| 2008 Reciprocity: Food System: A Call to Action - 5th National Assembly  
National gathering in Ottawa, Ontario agreed to support the People’s Food Policy Project. |
| 2010 Weaving Together Food Policy and Community Action: An Agenda for Change – 6th National Assembly  
National gathering in Montreal, Quebec presented a draft of the People’s Food Policy Project for feedback along with the development of key policy recommendations. |
| 2011 Peopled Food Policy  
Released Resetting the Table: A Peopled Food Policy for Canada and 10 discussion papers as living documents. |
| 2012 Powering Up Food for the Future - 7th National Assembly  
Held in Edmonton, Alberta |

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<th>BRITISH COLUMBIA</th>
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| 1993 FarmLink/First  
Established organization involved in community-based sustainable food systems that eventually supported the establishment of the British Columbia Food Systems Network. |
| 1999 Initial Gathering of the British Columbia Food Systems Network  
Held at the Sorrento Conference Centre on Shawnigan Lake, recognized the desire and need to perpetuate collaborative work and mutual support. |
| 2006 British Columbia Food Systems Network  
Established as a formal society with a board of directors. |
| 2006 British Columbia Food Systems Network’s Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty  
Established to increase awareness of underlying issues, concerns and strategies impacting food security in indigenous communities and to catalyze an indigenous voice into the food security movement. |
| 2009 17th Annual British Columbia Food Systems Network Gathering  
Moved from Sorrento to Chemainus, traditional Squamish territory, to rotate locations each year. |
| 2012 14th Annual British Columbia Food Systems Network Gathering  
Held on Gambier Island in the Howe Sound (Covet Salish territory) |

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<th>MANITOBA</th>
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| 1992 Food and Food Security Network of Manitoba  
Group of primarily dietitians engaged in provincial food security. |
| 1991 FoodSecure Manitoba  
Inter-agency, multi-sectoral collaborative group addressing provincial food security. |
| 2001 Manitoba Food Charter  
Provincial consultations to discuss ideas about the food system. |
| 2004 Manitoba Food Charter Inc.  
Legally incorporated as non-profit organization to foster the work of the charter. |
| 2004 Manitoba Food Security Network  
A group that has been in place since 2004. It is the provincial level of a national food security partnership initiative and eventually formed by FMN. |
| 2009 Food Matters Manitoba  
Name changed from Manitoba Food Charter to reflect the breadth and scope of their work including the goal to strengthen networks and partnerships that address food issues across the province. |
| 2012 5th Annual Grow Local Conference  
Hosted record number of attendees with keynote speaker Winona LaDuke. |

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<th>ONTARIO</th>
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| 1993 Food Security Working Group  
Established by the Ontario Public Health Association to advocate for a provincial food and nutrition strategy. |
| 2007 Working Meeting on Food and Agriculture Systems Reform  
Convened by the Metro Toronto Foundation to explore the opportunities for collaborative, cross-sectoral work. |
| 2007 FoodNet Ontario  
Established by Ontario Public Health Association and Ontario Health  
Communities Coalition to support local and regional community food security initiatives. |
| 2008 Sustain Ontario  
Established through a Metcalf Foundation grant as a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance to promote healthy food and farming. |
| 2010 Connecting Ontario Food and Farm Networks - 1st Annual Food Home Conference  
Hosted first national conference in Kitchener, coordinated by FoodNet and supported by Sustain Ontario and other partners. |
| 2011 Preparing the Ground for a Sustainable Food System - 2nd Annual Food Network Conference  
Culminated in strategic planning session and new network initiatives. |

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<th>NOVA SCOTIA</th>
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| 1986 Nova Scotia Nutrition Council  
Volunteer community health organization and progend to the Nova Scotia Food Security Network. |
Established to support a series of participatory food security projects. |
| 2002 1st Nova Scotia Participatory Food Coding  
Initiated a participatory approach to measuring the cost and affordability of the National Minimum Food Basket and the availability of locally produced foods to start a conversation around food security and develop strategies to change the food system. |
| 2006 Nova Scotia Food Security Network  
Coordinating committee originally established to oversee the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects and to make connections across the province, to create space for conversation, and to identify opportunities for moving food security work forward. |
| 2007 Food Security: Making the Nova Scotia Connection  
Launched 3rd provincial food security gathering in Detem, coordinated by the Nova Scotia Food Security Network. |
| 2009 Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security  
Established interdisciplinary research centre to support collaborative and participatory research initiatives. |
| 2010 Activating Change Together for Community Food Security  
Received a five-year grant to build collaboration between university researchers and community groups with the Nova Scotia Food Security Network as the main community partner. |
**The British Columbia Food Systems Network**

The roots of the BCFSN can be traced back to a number of initiatives that developed in the 1970s and 1980s in response to social, political and economic changes within the food system. Throughout the mid-1990s, various groups and individuals were undertaking preliminary work on food system policy across the province. Some of these efforts that served as the foundation for the BCFSN included FarmFolk/CityFolk\(^{16}\), community nutrition networks, federal and provincial pregnancy outreach programs\(^{17}\), the widespread organization of organic farmers, allies in food retail, and an active engagement of Indigenous people.

Between 1998 and 1999, the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands established a Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries to explore the impacts of new free trade agreements and federal cutbacks in farm safety nets on the agricultural sector. The Committee’s mandate was to “examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to an ‘Agri-food’ Policy for the new Millennium and beyond for British Columbia” (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia 2000). The Standing Committee was comprised of elected members of the Legislative Assembly and toured the province holding consultations with industry stakeholders, farmers and consumer groups.

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\(^{16}\) FarmFolk/CityFolk is an organization that connects urban and rural people with a vision of a local and sustainable food system (see [http://www.ffcf.bc.ca](http://www.ffcf.bc.ca)) and played a central role in developing the foundations for the provincial network.

\(^{17}\) At the Federal level, the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program is a community-based program delivered through the Public Health Agency of Canada. At the provincial level, British Columbia Pregnancy Outreach Programs provide prenatal and early parenting support to women who experience health or lifestyle challenges during pregnancy, birth and the transition to parenting.
With a desire from civil society to have input into these policy discussions, a group of thirty-five individuals involved in community-level food initiatives gathered in Sorrento, in British Columbia’s Southern Interior. Over the two-day meeting, the group shared experiences, began a dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of the food system, and build connections with others from across the province. The discussions focused on developing a common message the group would convey to the Standing Committee. In a final report from the gathering, the group emphasized the way that “food issues cross cultures, sectors, and age groups, and highlighted the need for food policy to link ministries dealing with health, agriculture, education, trade, environment, and women’s equality” (BCFSN 1999). The meeting concluded with the recognition that food policy required maintaining links between communities across the province and the proposal to formally establish a PNO (i.e. the BCFSN). Through broad participation, the nascent network committed to “a democratic process for policy development and [to] encourage public policies that foster economic viability, ecological health, and social justice” (BCFSN 1999).

Beyond the knowledge and experiences shared at the gathering, participants recognized the importance of strengthening connections more broadly with other individuals and groups interested in a healthy, ecological and just food system in British Columbia. Although they were only a loose alliance of individuals at the time, the group committed to meeting annually as a way to sustain relationships and encourage mutual support. The report from the third annual gathering noted,

The major purpose of the conference was not so much to develop action strategies as such, but to bring together, consolidate and galvanize a provincial network of people from rural, remote and reserve communities as well as towns and cities who will work together over the next year (BCFSN 2002).

In addition to the cross-provincial connections, participants emphasized a need to foster
grassroots capacity building through peer training and support. Concerned about the exaggerated role of “experts” and losing control of knowledge ownership, the network adhered to the principle that expertise exists in local places and amongst those engaged in food system work in their respective communities. At the annual gatherings, information and experience was shared through interactive workshops and skill training. Abra Brynne, past Communications Coordinator of the BCFSN, described this dynamic:

There’s a lot of formal and informal knowledge exchange . . . it energizes people, it helps provide them with some new things to think about or identify where things do and don’t work . . . and really gives them that community of people to draw on, whether it’s knowledge or just sheer moral support.

In 2004, the BCFSN eventually registered as a formal society with a board of directors. The decision to incorporate was made with the intention to develop a more formalized structure that would be sustainable and have legitimacy among food system stakeholders. The group continued to hold annual gatherings in Sorrento until 2009 when they moved the meeting to Chehalis on traditional Stó:lo territory. The BCFSN has continued to change locations annually to encourage broad participation. Describing the spirit of the meetings, Cathleen Kneen, the BCFSN’s first-coordinator, explained,

The gatherings included indigenous and concrete teachings – it was always something very hands-on, whether it was bread making or seed saving, along with some more theoretical discussions. There were always children and a dance with a local band, which would involve the kids.

From its beginnings, the BCFSN worked to include a diverse range of voices from across the province in discussions about the food system and setting priorities for action. Diversity and respect were key elements to the functioning of the BCFSN,

creating a context in which people old and young, Native, white, and immigrant, poor and middle class, welfare moms and ‘professionals’, all felt encouraged to speak from their own perspective. Networking in this context is not exchanging business cards but gaining a deep understanding of how our visions and goals are inter-connected (BCFSN 2006).
Participation of Indigenous communities remains a core aspect of the BCFSN today, and these efforts have been extremely influential for other provincial and national food networks. In 2006, the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) was established by the BCFSN in order to ensure that Indigenous perspectives were part of provincial discussions. According to the group’s chair, Dawn Morrison (2011), the WGIFS was created to promote an understanding of the underlying issues affecting Indigenous peoples’ ability to respond to our need for healthy, culturally appropriate foods . . . [and] to apply culturally appropriate protocols and ancient ways of knowing through a consensus-based approach to critically analyzing issues, concerns and strategies as they relate to Indigenous food, land, culture health, economics and sustainability (101).

The leadership and administration of the WGIFS and the BCFSN supported the recent establishment of the Indigenous Food Systems Network, an organization committed to facilitating a better understanding of the relationship between Indigenous land and the food system across Canada.

A central focus of the BCFSN has been to foster the capacity of local and regional groups in the province (BCFSN 2009). Describing the process and approach, a network member explained,

People come from little towns all over and they go back, and they form new groups. A couple of years ago the BCFSN decided what was important for us was to support those regional groups . . . we workshopped the idea, we all got on the floor and positioned ourselves where we belonged. Then we had breakaway groups that talked about how we defined ourselves as a region.

Recognizing the need for a multi-scale approach to impact the food system, the BCFSN has encouraged local AFIs to use the provincial network as a platform to make connections. The BCFSN’s goal has been to establish a coherent network structure to encourage the interactive flow of ideas and action between local, regional, provincial and national organizations.
In 2006, there was a significant shift in leadership of the BCFSN. While the network is maintained by the efforts and commitments from hundreds of people across the province, Cathleen Kneen played a unique role, devoting her knowledge, skills, volunteer time and energy into its development and evolution. Since BCFSN’s establishment, Kneen had served as its coordinator, organizing activities and providing technical support for communication and outreach. She was also able to (creatively) acquire the much needed funding to support the network’s activity. Throughout my interviews, organizational leaders throughout British Columbia expressed an immense personal and professional respect for Kneen. Many commented on Kneen’s deep commitment to food system transformation and her ability to make personal connections with others. The sentiments in the following comments from an AFI leader in British Columbia were heard repeatedly: “I came to the network partially because I had a huge respect for Cathleen and loved the way she was constructing it and I learned from her.” Another AFI representative commented: “When Cathleen was the chair [of the BCFSN], she was so well versed. She did all the research, knew all of the issues inside out and backwards . . . we trusted her to speak on our behalf.” When Kneen left the province in 2006 to focus her energies on building a national food network, the BCFSN was forced to reevaluate its operations. Today, there is renewed energy within the network as a number of young people have stepped forward to take on leadership roles along with the other non-profit and community leaders, academics, students, farmers, activists, and health professionals that currently comprise on the BCFSN’s steering committee.
Food Matters Manitoba

FMM emerged from decades of work by groups making connections between food, health, social justice and the environment. In 1974, Manitoba’s Frontier School Division introduced a health and nutrition advisor program and produced one of the first recorded documents that focused on issues of provincial food security with a food system perspective (Gardener 2006). This pioneering report laid some of the early groundwork for the networking efforts that followed. In 1992, another broad attempt was made to communicate the combined factors that resulted in provincial food insecurity. Constituted by a number of health and anti-poverty organizations, the Nutrition and Food Security Network of Manitoba published a report on the contributing factors to the household food insecurity of low-income residents along with a framework for policy reform and future research.

Building on these early efforts, in 2001 a collective of individuals and organizations came together under the name Food Secure Manitoba representing diverse food system stakeholders. Through the leadership of Paul Chorney, then community organizer and food co-op manager, Food Secure Manitoba hosted a small gathering that brought Rod MacRae, then coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council, to support a strategic visioning session. The gathering resulted in a set of concrete actions that prioritized a larger food security conference as a primary step. In 2003, Food Secure Manitoba received provincial government funding and through a partnership with the Centre for Policy Alternatives organized the first provincial food gathering: Making Manitoba Food Secure. In recognition of these innovative efforts, Manitoba was identified by a group of researchers and community practitioners to host an upcoming National Food Security Assembly.
In October 2004, representatives from across Canada gathered for the Growing Together Assembly in Winnipeg, hosted by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Winnipeg Harvest. For Manitoba’s emerging provincial food network, the most significant outcome of the period leading up to and including the national assembly was an initiative to develop a food charter similar to the one successfully developed in Toronto\textsuperscript{18}. The idea of moving the charter beyond the municipal-level was encouraged by participants from the North, who suggested the development of a provincial food charter that included farmers and Northerners. In March 2005, the newly established steering committee of The Food Charter Project organized a provincial-wide forum to solicit feedback on the proposed plan for a province-wide food charter. Over the next month, a series of community consultations began, and over the next year seventy stakeholders involved in Manitoba’s food system were consulted. Input came from across the province: 22% in rural communities, 17% in Manitoba’s North, 33% from urban groups, and 28% from consultations involving mixed regions (Gardiner 2006).

By May 2006, the provincial food charter was drafted and a second province-wide food gathering was held to solicit feedback and decide how to proceed. An original intention was for the provincial government to sign the charter. Stefan Epp-Koop, Community Food Assessment and Evaluation Coordinator at FMM explained that the charter was “intended for multiple signatories . . . [including] municipalities, educational organizations, businesses, other non-profits, and a wide range of organizations.” While consultations revealed that government representatives were supportive in principle, it became increasingly clear that they would not commit to the charter in writing. The final draft of the Charter provided a vision and principles

\textsuperscript{18} The Toronto Food Charter was established through broad citizen participation and adopted by City Council in March 2001. It presents a vision for a just and sustainable food system in Toronto. It is available at \url{www.toronto.ca/food_hunger/pdf/food_charter.pdf}. 
intended to guide and inform all levels of government, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and communities in a mutual effort toward food security and community development. The Charter’s vision was to work towards a “just and sustainable food system in Manitoba . . . rooted in healthy communities, where no one is hungry and everyone has access to nutritious food” (MFC 2006). Individual and organizational signatories committed to work in partnerships towards this vision and described action steps they would take.

In December 2006, the Manitoba Food Charter Inc. (MFC) legally incorporated as a non-profit organization. The organization was established to promote the charter, support activities towards fulfilling its vision and to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders. At a launch event, participants identified 170 action areas to guide the new organization. With funding from governments and private foundations, the MFC initiated an annual provincial Growing Local conference along with programming aimed at cultivating community food skills, providing public education, and building partnerships. In 2009, with over 125 active partners, the MFC changed its name to Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), to better reflect the breadth and scope of its work. Today, FMM is a registered charity and convenes a number of food-related networks bringing stakeholders together to support each other, share ideas, and develop strategies for future work. FMM has supported over forty community food projects, participates in a number of regional networks, and convenes the Manitoba Food Security Network, which meets twice annually and serves as a forum for people from across the province to connect, communicate, showcase their projects, and share resources.
Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming

Formally established in 2008, Sustain Ontario is the youngest of the four PNOs. Despite Ontario’s long and rich history of engagement in food and agriculture initiatives, there had been few broad-based collective efforts to address the food system in a comprehensive way. One notable exception was the establishment of Ontario Public Health Association’s (OPHA) Food Security Working Group in 1993 to advocate for the adoption of a provincial food and nutrition strategy. Over time, the Working Group became involved in broader food policy and supported other provincial and national initiatives. Through a partnership with the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC), a need was identified to increase the capacity of local and regional AFIs. In 2007, the two groups received a grant to create FoodNet Ontario (FoodNet) as a provincial information hub to support AFIs and sustainable food production. Despite developing the foundations for a broader coalition, FoodNet never coalesced into a robust PNO.

Recognizing the growing interest in collaboration, the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation 19 (Metcalf) decided to convene a meeting to explore the opportunities for partnership building and cross-sectoral work. Beginning May 2007, Metcalf held a series of working meetings that brought together its affiliated grantees and advisors to identify key food system priorities and to solicit feedback on opportunities to support future collaborations. Through the

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19 A Toronto-based charitable organization, Metcalf had been actively supporting food-related social justice, health and farming initiatives across Southern Ontario. Metcalf’s mission is to enhance the effectiveness of people and organizations working together to help Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society (www.metalffoundation.org).
meetings, the group explored joint opportunities for “cooperative, integrated work with the goal of transforming food and agriculture at a system-wide level” (Metcalf Foundation 2008: 5).

Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker, the current director of Sustain Ontario explained that there was a need for “somebody to bring us [AFIs] together so that we could exchange knowledge, understand each other better and build new solutions in order to do advocacy.” The broad array of actors invited to participate represented the breadth and diversity of the initiatives in Southern Ontario from urban food security and food policy organizations to peri-urban and rural groups involved in farm viability and agricultural land preservation. The diverse range of individuals, AFIs and other organizations involved in this meeting also highlighted the ways that food system issues could bring overlapping networks into collaboration.

As a first step, the group decided to commission a position paper that would provide an analysis and broadly frame ways to work towards a local, sustainable and accessible food system in Ontario. The intention was to conduct an environmental scan and analysis based on consultations with food and farming organizations across the province that documented critical concerns about the food system. With a focus on common interests, the aim of the paper was to weave together multiple food related issues and explore the benefits of a comprehensive approach. The final publication was entitled *Food Connects Us All* (Metcalf Foundation 2008),

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20 The original group that Metcalf brought together included twenty-two individuals and organizations: Bob Bailey, Delta Waterfowl Foundation; Adriana Beemans, Toronto Community Housing Corporation; Diana Crosbie, Crosbie Communications; Debbie Field, FoodShare; Stewart Hilts, University of Guelph; Karen Hutchinson, Caledon Countryside Alliance; John Knechtle, Alphabet City; Pat Learmonth, Kawartha Heritage Conservancy; Nina-Marie Lister, Ryerson University; Janet Maher, Health Care Providers Against Poverty; Katie Rabinowicz and Andrea Winkler, Multistory Complex; Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council; Pamela Robinson, Ryerson University; Nicola Ross, Alternatives Journal; Kathryn Scharf, The Stop Community Food Centre; Lori Stahlbrand, Local Food Plus; Elbert van Donkersgoed, GTA Agricultural Action Committee; Marcia Wallace, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Melissa Watkins, Ontario Farmland Trust; Gary Wilkins, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority; Mark Winfield, York University; Christie Young, FarmStart.
and garnered positive response from government and other policy makers. The paper also laid the foundation for the establishment of Sustain Ontario.

In February 2008, Jeanette Longfield, coordinator of Sustain: the Alliance for Better Food and Farming in the United Kingdom (Sustain UK) was invited to Toronto by the nascent PNO to share the experiences of her organization. Through a series of meetings and a public discussion, Jeanette spoke about the relationships between food and farming and the way that regional alliances in the UK had responded to global food system trends. Sustain UK had facilitated the networking of over 100 organizations without unitary consensus and achieved significant successes including campaigning for student nutrition programs, farm-to-table projects, sustainable agriculture, and alternative food marketing and procurement. Inspired by Sustain UK’s organizational model and with the success of a funding application to Metcalf, the network established a more formal organizational structure. In 2008, Sustain Ontario was established, with its own staff, co-chairs, an advisory council and a steering committee representing the diversity within the food and farming sector. When Sustain Ontario’s advisory council first convened, it became clear that working collaboratively as a network provided the opportunity to reach out to a broader range of organizations and groups across the province that had important experience to share but limited access to resources. Further, Sustain Ontario’s leadership recognized that a broad provincial alliance was necessary to pursue the goals of a regionally integrated, sustainable food system. For these reasons, a decision was made to expand the mandate of Sustain Ontario to include the entire province rather than only focus on its

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21 Sustain Ontario is structured as non-profit charitable organization under the auspices of Tides Canada, a federally registered charity who’s mission focuses on environmental and social sustainability (www.tidescanada.org). Sustain Ontario furthers the mission of Tides Canada and adheres to its policies as well as the requirements of the Charities Directorate of the Canadian Revenue Agency. The Tides Canada Board has full governing, legal and fiduciary responsibility for Sustain Ontario.
Southern Ontario roots.

Between 2009 and 2010, Metcalf funded the research and publication of five food solution working papers that suggested tangible ways to advance a local, sustainable food system agenda in Ontario over the next five to ten years. During the writing of the papers, Metcalf periodically brought the authors together to discuss the content of their research with respect to the broader food sector and the connections between social justice, health and sustainable agriculture in Southern Ontario. A summary paper, *Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario* (Baker et al. 2010), was authored by Sustain Ontario and was adopted as a guide to work towards comprehensive solutions to provincial food, farming and health policy. One of the main recommendations that emerged was for the development of a policy platform (eventually named the Ontario Farm, Food and Health Act), to advocate for policies, programs, regulations, and taxation in favour of the local food economy and access to healthy food.

Sustain Ontario currently serves as a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance for food and farming in the province of Ontario. It works to strengthen existing networks within the province by linking diverse communities. Sustain Ontario does not work on consensus but plays a convening function by providing a platform for multiple voices. As Lauren Baker, the founding director of Sustain Ontario explained,

Sustain Ontario’s goal is to bring people together who consider themselves part of the food movement and . . . even beyond that, anybody who is working to further Sustain Ontario’s vision, to provide a way for people to come together, to work toward a common goal, and to define pieces of work that they can collaborate on.

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22 The five paper titles included *Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario; In Every Community a Place for Food: The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable, and Just Food System; New Farmers and Alternative Markets Within the Supply-Managed System; Nurturing Fruit and Vegetable Processing in Ontario; and, Scaling Up Urban Agriculture in Toronto: Building the Infrastructure*. The Metcalf Food Solutions papers are available at [http://metcalffoundation.com](http://metcalffoundation.com).
This happens, in part, through bi-annual provincial conferences, a web-based newsletter and listserv, a series of research publications and campaigns, and working groups that have evolved from the interests and energies of the membership.

The establishment of Sustain Ontario was the product of a particular historical moment that included the efforts of Metcalf along with numerous organizations and individuals around the province. While Sustain Ontario did not formally incorporate until 2008, previous efforts established the foundations and created the conditions for a provincial food network to evolve. While the efforts of FoodNet never fully coalesced into a robust PNO, in 2010 and 2011, FoodNet and Sustain Ontario worked together on the planning and program development for the provincial Bring Food Home Conference. In addition, Sustain’s director sits on the coordinating committee of FoodNet and there is a FoodNet representative on Sustain Ontario’s advisory council. As of 2013, there have been discussions about merging the two organizations in an effort to create a more robust PNO structure.

**The Nova Scotia Food Security Network**

The birth story of the NSFSN begins with the collaborative relationship between academic, public health and community groups concerned with food insecurity in the province. In 1989, the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council (NSNC) conducted a food costing survey in the province and published a report, which showed that people on income
assistance could not afford to eat a nutritious diet\textsuperscript{23} (NSNC 1998). That finding encouraged a small group of dietitians and nutritionists to initiate an advocacy project focused on increasing income assistance rates. Despite some successes, the project was short-lived due to funding constraints and the limited capacity of the NSNC to support the group.

By 2000, food insecurity had worsened in Nova Scotia. At a workshop held by the NSNC at St. Francis Xavier University, a number of participants expressed interest in revisiting the idea of food costing as a way to address issues of poverty in the province\textsuperscript{24}. From this meeting, a group of public health professionals and academics came together to form the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council Research Working Group (NSNCRWG) led by Patty Williams, then a post-doctoral student at the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC). The group developed a participatory food costing model (Williams et al. 2012) along with several other innovative food security projects that engaged stakeholders in the co-creation of knowledge around policy changes required to build community food security. By 2011, there were over thirty participatory action research and knowledge mobilization projects that were known collectively as the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects (NSPFSP). From 2001 to 2005 the projects were hosted at Dalhousie University, and from 2006 to the present through Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax.

Despite the work of the NSFSP, many of the AFIs in Nova Scotia seemed to be working in relative isolation from one another. Rita MacAulay, Public Health Nutritionist and a founding

\textsuperscript{23} The food costing project is part of Health Canada’s National Nutritious Food Basket, which attempts to monitor the cost and affordability of eating a healthy diet. The results are used to promote and support the development of policies to increase access to nutritious food. Provincial, territorial and regional governments develop their own protocols to guide data collection in their jurisdiction.

\textsuperscript{24} The workshop involved community groups, researchers, and representatives from the federally funded Community Action Program for Children and Canadian Parental Nutrition Program projects.
member of the NSFSN explained, “There wasn’t any kind of sustainable home for all of this work since we were dependent on research grants. When they ran out, there was always a scramble to figure out what to do next. We needed a body independent of the research funding.”

In 2005, there was a turning point for the evolving network when the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection (NSHPP) named food security as one of four priority action areas\(^\text{25}\). The priorities were named in a report entitled *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia*, which served as a strategic plan to address nutrition-related health issues (HEAG 2005). At the time, the report became the first provincial food and nutrition strategy developed through active partnership between government and non-government organizations, private corporations and professional associations, and in consultation with the broader community. To promote the priorities, the NSPFSP received a provincial grant to develop an action plan to continue building food security\(^\text{26}\). The steering committee of the NSPFSP agreed there was a need for a more formalized structure that would contribute to the implementation of Healthy Eating Nova Scotia and connect people and projects across funding cycles. This way, when there was a dearth in funding there would still be a core group that maintained connections between the different people and projects.

In June 2006, the steering committee of the NSPFSP recommended the establishment of a Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) that would include even broader representation from organizations in multiple sectors and a coordinating committee to guide all existing and

\(^{25}\) The Department of Health Promotion and Protection released Healthy Eating Nova Scotia in March 2005 as a strategic plan to address nutrition-related health issues. The report was produced in partnership with the Healthy Eating Action Group of the Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity.

\(^{26}\) The Department of Health Promotion, now the Department of Health and Wellness has provided ongoing funding since this point.
future work. Christine Johnston, a founding member of NSFSN explained that the new group was intended to be a hub with an aim to “connect different people in the province around the work that was happening.” The NSFSN Coordinating Committee was established to reflect the geographic, cultural, and sectoral diversity of the province with a mandate to make connections across the province, to create space for conversation, and to identify opportunities for moving food security work forward.

The establishment of the NSFSN has contributed to the establishment of tools for knowledge mobilization (e.g. Thought About Food? A Workbook on Food Security Policy and the DVD, Food Security: It’s Everyone Business); government supports for implementation of a participatory food costing model that includes methods to assess the availability and cost of locally produced foods in communities throughout Nova Scotia; the establishment of the FoodARC (formerly the Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security) in 2009; a five year (2010-2015) Community University Research Alliance grant, Activating Change Together for Community Food Security (ACT for CFS), with the NSFSN as the core community partner; and, increases to income assistance rates in the province. The NSFSN has hosted three provincial gatherings (in 2007, 2008 and 2013) and in 2009, the coordinating committee actively participated in a collaborative consultation, Moving the Food Movement, which brought together representatives from multiple sectors across the province. The event included training in participatory leadership and an opportunity for food related organizations to collectively explore their mission, vision and ways of working together. The NSFSN still oversees participatory food costing through a working group that operates within the network.
Mobilization Beyond the Provincial Scale

Tracing the development of the four PNOs highlights the role of local level organizing as an integral part of mobilization on the provincial scale. Likewise, local and provincial efforts have been interconnected to mobilization that has occurred on a national (and global) scale. These developments also highlight the way that the provincial networks are actually constituted by overlapping networks of actors and spaces. Thus, this story would be incomplete without a brief recounting of the key moments that have brought together actors beyond the provincial scale. These broader efforts have been shaped by, and have also contributed to the shaping of the provincial networks.

In 1996, the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization hosted the World Food Summit in Rome in response to the widespread concerns regarding under-nutrition and the capacity of agriculture to meet future food needs. The meeting adopted the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, which outlined a set of commitments. The declaration stated, “We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015” (FAO 1996). The statement was a call was for governments to develop and implement a plan to achieve food security nationally and globally. The meeting also adopted the World Food Summit Plan of Action, which included strategic details recommended to meet these commitments. The plan envisioned a multi-sector approach that included all levels of government, civil society and the private sector. In response, the Canadian government created the Food Security Bureau within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada located in the Global Affairs Branch. The Bureau however, existed only as a virtual office with a website that was understaffed and underfunded (Koc et al. 2008).
The inauguration of the first World Food Summit and the insufficient government response (in Canada and beyond) resulted in responses from social movements around the world. As Canadians followed the rise of the community food security movement in the United States and the food sovereignty movement in the global south, they recognized a need for a public forum to discuss food system issues and a space for collaboration and strategic action. In 1999, a group of academic and community researchers gathered in Toronto to discuss the possibility of forming a national food network that would consist of representatives from academia, community organizations, and the government. One of the outcomes of the meeting was the formation of the Food Democracy Network, which initiated a listserv to coordinate communication across the country (Koc and MacRae 2001). Their efforts were expedited by an invitation to civil society from the Canadian government to contribute input during the preparation of the official submission to the second World Food Summit – Five Years Later (WFS-FYL) to be held in 2001 in Rome.

In 2001, representatives from civil society organizations and regional networks across the country (and globally) came together to attend the Working Together: Civil Society Input for Food Security in Canada conference at Ryerson University in Toronto. The conference’s objective was to develop strategies for increasing Canada’s commitment to food security both domestically and internationally. Participants made recommendations to the federal government to look beyond physical and biological dimensions of food security and to include cultural, ecological and social aspects along with the right to food. In one of the workshops, a key proposal emerged to establish a more formal structure for a national civil society network. In the conference proceedings the recommendation proposed the establishment of a broad alliance “to strengthen democracy by utilizing our knowledge and resources more effectively, by avoiding duplication of efforts and by coordination of capacities and expertise” (Koc and MacRae 2001:
Further to this, the main outcome from the conference was a joint resolution from participants that stated: “The Conference resolves that there is a need for a national Canadian Food Security Network and that the organizing committee has the temporary mandate to explore ways of facilitating this and opening it up to a broad-based national membership” (Koc and MacRae 2001: 49, emphasis in the original). Due in part to the events in the United States on September 11th 2001, the WFS-FYL was postponed to the following summer and when they did meet, the FAO conceded that the 2015 target could not be met. Civil society organizing however, continued to move forward.

A major tension that surrounded the formation of a national network organization had existed between members who promoted explicit political orientations and those that argued the organization needed to become “big tent” with a focus on broad inclusivity. After much negotiation, at the Second National Assembly in Winnipeg in 2004, participants collectively agreed to three interlocking commitments that formed the vision for the new national network organization, eventually adopting the name FSC/SAC. These commitments were: 1) Zero Hunger, that all people at all times must be able to acquire, in a dignified manner, adequate quantity and quality of culturally and personally acceptable food; 2) A Sustainable Food System, that food be produced, harvested, processed, distributed and consumed in a manner which maintains and enhances the quality of land, air and water for future generations, and in which people are able to earn a living wage in a safe and healthy working environment by harvesting, growing, producing, processing, handling, retailing and serving food; and, 3) Healthy and Safe Food, that safe and nourishing foods must be readily at hand, not be contaminated with pathogens or industrial chemicals, and that no novel food can be allowed to enter the environment or food chain without rigorous independent testing and the existence of an on-going tracking and surveillance system, to ensure its safety for human consumption.
FSC/SAC was formally ratified in 2005 at the third National Food Security Assembly and incorporated as a non-profit organization the following year, holding its first Annual General Meeting in 2006. Its mission stated that FSC/SAC was to be a “Canada-wide alliance of civil society organizations and individuals collaborating to advance dialogue and cooperation for policies and programs that improve food security in Canada and globally.” To accomplish its objectives, the organization holds a biennial conference in co-organized with the PNOs, works to support its members, and aims to create space for dialogue and collaboration across the country. Its main function is to facilitate collaboration between members and to use its collective voice only when members give formal approval. FSC/SAC’s initial vision, according to Cathleen Kneen (2011), the organization’s volunteer chair from 2008-2012, was to create a coherent food movement in Canada that could strengthen local projects and support a national food policy for a just and sustainable food system. The idea was to bring together all the very different perspectives working on food issues, insisting that ending hunger, supporting population health through healthy and safe food and ensuring the environmental (and economic) sustainability of the food system are necessarily interlinked.

This inclusive and horizontal approach to organizing was determined to be the most effective strategy to avoid becoming sidelined by existing conflicts between members. With the development of the new organization and an initial working plan, the 2010 Assembly proceedings stated:

The Assembly as a whole marked a milestone in the development of the food movement in Canada. It is no longer just an expression of the long-term commitments of people who have been working for decades to improve the health and wellbeing of populations and environments in Canada. Those commitments are now embedded in a broad social movement for global justice and equity, which is not only growing, but growing stronger – and younger (Steigman and Kneen 2011: 26).

In 2012, Cathleen Kneen, the long-time volunteer chair of FSC/SAC stepped down, causing the organization to reevaluate its work and staffing structure. Thirty individuals (including the author) participated in a two-day retreat to consider the next steps for the national network. One of the
concrete decisions coming out of the retreat was to hire the organization’s first executive
director, Diana Bronson, who began in the spring of 2012.

Parallel to these developments, another national food organization was emerging with an
interest in building partnerships among food researchers. In April of 2005 a meeting was held at
Ryerson University to discuss an (ultimately unsuccessful) grant application to the Social
Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a Community University Research
Alliance (CURA) that aimed to build links between community and university food researchers.
In order to build on the energy of FSC/SAC and the burgeoning partnerships, the group decided
to form an association that would bring together academics, community and public sector
researchers that were committed to generating new food-related knowledge in response to social
needs. At the initial meeting, participants emphasized policy-relevant scholarship that could be
used to build arguments aimed at decision makers and support existing initiatives towards food
system transformation. Taking the name the Canadian Association for Food
Studies/l’Association canadienne des études sur l’alimentation (CAFS/ACÉA), the intent was to
“promote critical, interdisciplinary scholarship in the broad area of food policy, production,
distribution and consumption . . . [and to address] the complex relationships between food-
related issues” (Power and Koc 2008: 264). In the inaugural CAFS/ACÉA newsletter, founding
President Mustafa Koc (2006) wrote about the need for broader systemic perspectives in food
research that supported existing network activities:

Food is a process not a product. Looking at food as a process implies careful scrutiny of
interlinkages and interconnections among these practices, processes, and structures. This awareness, in return implies the need for interdisciplinary collaboration so that we
can benefit from different methodological and analytical strengths of diverse academic
disciplines (1).

Since its inauguration, CAFS/ACÉA has held annual assemblies that have brought together a
range of scholars interested in food studies research to continue to promote issues surrounding
the broad goals of improving the food system. CAFS/ACÉA was conceived as a sister organization to FSC/SAC, to allow university and community-based researchers from diverse disciplines to meet regularly and share their work with each other and the broader public. The two organizations agreed to keep an arms-length relationship to allow for independent development.

The establishment of FSC/SAC and CAFS/ACÉA as national organizations was the result of a long history of mobilization around food issues. Many of the founding leaders of the two organizations were deeply involved in the PFC and were directly connected to existing local, provincial and global food networks (as illustrated by the case of Cathleen Kneen, discussed throughout this chapter). Both FSC/SAC and CAFS/ACÉA have become a platform for the provincial networks to connect with each other, share strategies and collaborate. In 2010, FSC/SAC passed a formal resolution to establish an official provincial network working group. Through this resolution, FSC/SAC formally committed to carving out time and space for the provincial networks to meet during the National Assemblies. Further, FSC/SAC hosts a bi-monthly provincial network teleconference as a space for the PNOs and other provincial actors to establish regular communication. Also involving the provincial networks, there have been a number of project and research based collaborations committed to sharing resources and strategies.

The People’s Food Policy (PFP) is an example of collaboration between individuals, organizations and networks at multiple scales. Supported by FSC/SAC, CSFS/ACÉA, the four PNOs in this study, and countless others, the PFP initiated Canada’s first and only citizen-led comprehensive food policy. It proposes a radical and democratic vision for a healthy, ecological and just food system that would provide enough healthy, acceptable, and accessible food for all
The original idea was inspired by a number of FSC/SAC members that attended the 2007 Néléné Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, West Africa. The forum was a gathering of more than 500 global peasants, family farmers, artisanal fisher-folk, Indigenous peoples, landless peasants, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty (Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007). In 2008, a steering committee was established made up of a number of organizations that were involved in the original PFC (including the National Farmer’s Union, USC Canada, and Inter Pares). Rooted in the idea of food sovereignty\(^\text{27}\), the PFP officially launched in November 2008 to build on the work of the PFC.

Reflecting on the PFP, Kneen (in Holt-Giménez et al. 2010) writes

> This project builds on the local organizing that is already going on in the multiplicity of food self-reliance projects in both rural and urban areas, and its method is to overcome the “individual” by starting with the personal. People are encouraged to examine the barriers to the food security projects they are engaged in, and to tease out the policies that support or have erected those barriers (234).

Developed as a coalition between multiple organizations, the PFP depended on the PNOs along with numerous local networks to organize people at the grassroots level. Throughout the three year process thousands of individuals and hundreds of AFIs came together through “kitchen table talks” to reflect on the challenges of the dominant food system. Through collaborative discussions, they proposed and prioritized the basis of a national food policy. Writing teams gathered the recommendations and prepared several drafts that were circulated back to the AFIs and other participants for feedback and formally reviewed as part of FSC/SAC’s 2010 National Assembly. In April 2011, the PFP was launched on Parliament Hill in

\(^{27}\) Food sovereignty is the concept that the food system should be controlled by those who produce and consume food as opposed to corporate interests and global financial institutions and where food is viewed as the foundation for healthy lives, communities, economies and eco-systems (Patel 2009; Wittman et al. 2010).
Ottawa. The PFP attracted interest from within Canada and around the globe, resonating with others attempting to develop national food policy processes. As described at the outset of this dissertation, it also laid the groundwork for the 2012 visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food who recognized the high level of organization among Canada’s “food movement.” The collaborative processes described here highlight the connection between the multiple AFIs and provincial food networks in Canada that came together at different moments to develop the PFP and establish a long-term vision for collaboration.

**Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have provided an overview of the development of the provincial networks and the PNOs in the four case study provinces along with the context of broader food networks in Canada. I have also highlighted the way the provincial networks have been constituted by contextualized and overlapping networks of actors and spaces. However, the moments described here are only a part of a much more intricate and detailed story of food networks that is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Far from being a new or temporary trend, food networks are part of a long process of mobilization around food issues that crosses sectors, scales and geographies. While there is only enough space here to discuss the case studies, PNOs have been established in other provinces including Alberta (Growing Food Security in Alberta est. 2003), Saskatchewan (Food Secure Saskatchewan est. 2006), New Brunswick (The New Brunswick food Security Action Network est. 2010), Prince Edward Island (The Prince Edward Island Food Security Network est. 2008), Newfoundland and Labrador (The Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador est. 1998), and most recently the Yukon Territory. There is also a regional network that has been established in Canada’s North, hosted by FSC/SAC (The Northern Food Network est. 2010). Together, these collaborative efforts may
be illustrative of a new wave in food activism that is represented by the emergence of new forms of network building. In the next chapter, I examine the collaborations among AFIs in more detail by investigating the structure and constitution of the four case study networks. Drawing on the analytic of assemblages, I explore the ways we might understand the provincial networks as deeply interconnected yet highly decentralized collaborations of AFIs with diverse objectives, approaches and tactics.
Chapter 5
Mobilizing Assemblages:
The Structure of the Provincial Food Networks

During the years the gardener watched the single bamboo shoot grow tall, underground the bamboo rhizome grew horizontally, spreading throughout the yard, storing nutrients in anticipation of a coming spring. Like the bamboo garden, social movements are often rhizomatic organisms growing horizontally into new terrains, establishing connections just below the surface of everyday life, eventually bursting forth in unpredictable ways.

~Scott Uzelman (2005: 17)

In the quotation that begins this chapter, Scott Uzelman uses the rhizome metaphor to describe his observations of the autonomous media movement. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) first introduced the metaphor of the rhizome for uncovering complex social structures (Bonta and Provett 2004). In the introduction to the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, they write,

> unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point . . . The rhizome is reducible neither to One nor the multiple . . . it is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and overspills . . . the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21).

In botany, rhizomes are horizontal, underground plant stems with the ability to create complex root systems. They can expand relentlessly underground, often lying dormant for years, and re-emerge as healthy plants in different locations when the internal and external conditions are right. Each new plant created is connected to the parent but exists as its own independent,

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28 Langlois and Dubois (2005) describe autonomous media movements as “the vehicles of social movements. They are attempts to subvert the social order by reclaiming the means of communication [from the private domain]” (9).
flourishing entity. As Uzelman suggests, using the rhizome metaphor to describe social movement networks implies a shift from thinking based on binaries and totalities to embracing complexity, multiplicity, and emergence (as described in Chapter 2, mobilizing assemblages). In this chapter, I build on these ideas about social movement networks as a way to describe provincial food networks using the concept of assemblages (for a discussion of food networks in relation to the rhizome metaphor see Levkoe 2011b; for a visual depiction of the networks as a rhizome see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1).

In the previous chapter, I introduced the four case study provinces and the key moments that led to the establishment of the PNOs. I also highlighted the ways the provincial networks were constituted by contextualized and overlapping networks of actors and spaces. In this chapter, I explore the activities, structures and relations developing within the provincial food networks. Drawing on the network survey, interviews and popular education workshops, I investigate the structure and constitution of the four case study networks. Specifically, I identify the kinds of relationships and collaborations taking place within each of the networks and identify the resulting challenges and opportunities for network actors. I emphasize the dynamic and complex forms of network building being undertaken, along with the theoretical and political implications of these efforts for network mobilization. As I described in Chapter 2, the majority of existing research tends to consider individual AFIs as operating independently on specific projects (e.g. community gardens, farmer’s markets, organic and/or fair trade collectives, and the like); even scholars that make reference to an elusive “food movement” rarely explain what it is, what unites it, or its significance for broader political transformation. To date, there has been little consideration of collaborative mobilization among AFIs, or of the networks being built

29 Parts of this chapter have been adapted from Levkoe and Wakefield (2013).
across sectors, scales and geographies by AFIs, and what these might mean for efforts to transform the food system.

I begin by building on the literature about social movements discussed in Chapter 2 to develop a better understanding of the way that scholars have thought about social movement networks and then return to the concept of assemblages. Next, I present the methods used to study these networks and data from the research, in order to illuminate the characteristics of these food networks. In the final section, I discuss the explanatory power of various conceptions of social movement networks in relation to the case studies. I argue that analyzing AFI networks as assemblages helps us to understand new opportunities and challenges for movement building. The chapter concludes by suggesting some possible implications for the study and practice of mobilizing for a transformative food politics.

**Networks Matter: Perspectives on Social Movement Networks**

Over the past fifty years, the analyses of ways that collective action originates and operates have changed significantly. In Chapter 2, I discussed these developments focusing on the establishment of new social movement theory (NSM) and more recent calls to understand the shifting dynamics of social movement activity over the past two decades. Related to these perspectives, I also described a significant body of scholarship that analyzes human action and social change efforts as embedded in social relations, and collective action as organized through networks (Granovetter 1985; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Diani 2011). Instead of viewing actors in isolation, a network perspective understands social movements as a web of relationships and attempts to understand the patterns among these interactions. Today, there is a growing consensus in the literature that networks are central to social mobilization (Keck and Sikkink
and that much can be learned about social movement activity by studying network relations (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed background discussion of social movement and network theory).

Mario Diani, an Italian sociologist who has spent much of his career studying European social movements, contends that there is no singular body of scholarship on social movement networks. In an attempt to identify common threads that exist within this diverse intellectual tradition, Diani (2011) distinguishes three themes (see also Diani and Bison 2004). First, he suggests that social movement networks coalesce around conflictual orientations by clearly identifying political or social opponents. Collective action against these targets typically aims to “address collective problems, redress injustices, achieve public goods, tackle sources of grievances, or express support to some moral values or principles” (Diani and Bison 2004: 283). The conflictual nature of social movement network processes is predicated on the idea that collective claims conflict with someone else’s interests (Tilly and Wood 2009: 3).

Second, Diani argues that social movement networks consist of exchanges between autonomous actors engaged in collective projects (see also Diani 1992a). Others have argued that this collaboration must be strong and sustained over time (Tilly and Wood 2009; Tarrow 2011: 16). For example, Saunders (2007) writes, “[actors] must share in at least some actions and events rather than just sit on information” (238, emphasis in the original). She explains that collaborative interaction between network actors should be more than just cursory, and actors must participate in ongoing actions and events as opposed to only exchanging information. To empirically capture the structure of relations within a network, centrality measures are used to describe the “location” of actors in terms of how close they are to the centre of the action. It is generally accepted that actors who have more connections are more likely to be powerful
because they can exert their influence and are better situated to access knowledge (Bodin and Crona 2009). Information and values are typically seen as easier to translate in centralized networks (Newig et al. 2010), while decentralized networks are typically better suited for complex tasks such as negotiation, since there are fewer power imbalances among actors (Crona and Bodin 2006).

Third, Diani notes that social movement networks exhibit a long-term sense of collective identity or solidarity among a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations, which in turn translates into sustained networks with common goals. This involves sharing specific values or orientations and pursuing specific, well-defined objectives. Shared beliefs and a sense of belongingness are central to determining the boundaries of a social movement; in other words, “only those actors, sharing the same beliefs and sense of belongingness, can be considered to be part of the movement” (Diani 1992a: 9). The distribution of knowledge and flow of ideas is thought to occur more quickly among similar - more homophilous - actors (Rogers 1995:18; Cross et al. 2001); however, they may also have a tendency to be less open to new ideas and information from outside the network (Krackhardt and Stern 1988). Still, Diani stresses that identity links do not necessarily imply that networks are homogenous, since collective identity is always contested and negotiated.

Social movement theory is a collection of overlapping – and sometimes contradictory – ideas about the ways social movements form, function, and succeed or fail. In the three-part schema presented above, Diani (2011; see also Diani and Bison 2004) seek to summarize what is most generally agreed upon by theorists: namely, the importance of an oppositional orientation and clear demands, strong and increasingly hierarchical networks (as the movement moves from conducting isolated, sporadic activities to developing a more unified and wide-reaching voice),
and a sense of collective identity and shared beliefs to drive the movement. This being said, there is not complete agreement on any of these points within the literature. In addition, there has been some suggestion that these principles do not fully capture the activities of some “movements”; for example, democratic media activism (Langois and Dubois 2005; Carroll and Hackett 2006), global justice (Juris 2008), and social movements in Latin America (Escobar 1992; 2008). Similarly, recent work on the Occupy movement (Hayduk et al. 2012; Juris 2012) documents patterns of organization that similarly fail to correspond with expected practices of network formation. Some theorists (e.g., Escobar 1992; 2008; Feixa et al. 2009; Escobar and Osterweil 2010) have suggested that existing social movement theory is perhaps too rigid and normative in its conceptualization of social networks, and that it needs to be more sensitive to historical embeddedness, context, and the “irreducible social complexity of the world” (Escobar and Osterweil 2010: 191).

In response, an emerging group of scholars have attempted to understand social movement networks using the lens of assemblages: interminable, self-organized networks of diverse actors constituted through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation of the concept of assemblages). Using this lens, networks are seen as having dynamic properties that cannot be explained solely by the aggregation of their individual parts. Assemblages are difficult to bound because each component of the system is connected in myriad ways to other components; boundaries therefore become delineations of convenience rather than absolute, fixed borders between “in” and “out”. Building on the principles of assemblage theory (De Landa 2006) and conceptualizing networks as assemblages of actors, discourses, alliances, interests and knowledge, some scholars have begun to describe what they see as a new politics of resistance occurring within network mobilization (Chesters and Welsh 2005; Escobar 2008; McFarlane
For example, Kumar (2010), in discussing the cross-boundary assemblage of groups in opposition to mining in Niyamgiri, writes of the way that “diverse processes driven by different logics and drivers can interact with each other in an assemblage, without being subservient to the larger logic of a ‘whole’, though they may be contingently affected by the emergent capacities of the individuated assemblage” (5).

The global justice movement in particular has been depicted as an assemblage of actors, knowledge and nature (see also Kavada 2003; Chesters and Welsh 2005; Escobar 2008; Juris 2008). Global justice networks have been described in this work as emergent, diverse and comprised of self-organized actors through democratic, bottom-up processes. Further, the networks are said to be constituted by multiple and diverse connections as well as by numerous entry and exit points, where any actor within a network can be connected to any other in a variety of ways (McFarlane 2009). In these studies, network processes are described as constituting a prefigurative politics, where the mode of organizing reflects the desired social relations. That is, “they [networks] are generating social laboratories for the production of alternative democratic values, discourses, and practices” (Juris 2008: 3). For example, in studying the environmental justice movement, Schlosberg (1999) writes, “networks are not simply a means to an end - and a defensive end at that. They are an example of an attempt at an alternative political structure” (142). Similarly, David Graeber (2004) suggests that,

When protesters in Seattle chanted ‘this is what democracy looks like’, they meant to be taken literally . . . they not only confronted a certain form of power . . . they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why all the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization was the movement’s ideology (84).

However, both the novelty and effectiveness of these new network forms remains an open question, as little scholarship has yet examined them.
These observations of global justice networks are particularly relevant to the collective efforts among AFIs that have emerged in response to increasing concerns about the ecological, socio-political and economic implications of the corporate led industrial food system. The rise of AFIs has been meteoric, with studies identifying a growing and increasingly powerful “food movement” (see for example Allen 2004; Starr 2010; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). However, AFIs have been criticized for adopting localized self-provisioning models that tend to focus on individual and community-level solutions (Winter 2003; Allen 2008), potentially ignoring the interconnected nature of problems within the food system and reifying the local scale and specificity of food system issues and problems (Dupuis and Goodman 2005). These critiques have provided an important caution against the potential complicity of AFIs in a neoliberal governance strategy that produces isolated, individuated and unreflexive subjects and spaces. However, despite the suggestion that AFIs may be part of a broader social movement, few researchers have considered collaborations between AFIs, or the structure of the networks AFIs are building across sectors and scales – an omission that this work seeks to address.

Methods

This chapter draws together information about the relationships among organizational actors within each network, and about the kinds of work happening collaboratively, in order to understand the general structures and relations within the networks. Specifically, I use data from the network survey, the in-depth interviews and the popular education workshops. The survey was intended to collect background information on the AFIs and the relationships within the provincial food networks. It was sent across each of the provincial listservs and targeted to all organizations and groups working on food related issues (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of the network survey and other methods). Quantitative survey responses were
analyzed using SPSS software: summary statistics were produced for this data and are presented in the sections below\(^{30}\). In the survey, respondents were asked to list the organizations or groups they were involved with most frequently and that they believed were most valuable to their organization for helping address food issues. Results were coded and UCINET was used to complete an ego network analysis to generate values of centrality and identify central actors in the networks. NetDraw (part of the UCINET software) was used to generate sociograms (or network diagrams) to illustrate the in-degree relations within each provincial network. Open-ended survey question responses and interview responses were organized into emergent categories; quotes from the interviews are used to provide greater insight into particular key themes. The summary charts from the popular education workshops are presented in full.

**The Structures and Relationships in the Provincial Food Networks**

This section highlights some of the main structures and relationships among the four provincial food network case studies. These findings are then drawn out in the discussion section, to illuminate the structure of these networks in relation to the literature.

**Multiple types of work and diverse types of relationships**

Survey respondents were asked to identify the kinds of work their organization is most frequently involved in by ranking a list of issue-areas (including spaces to identify other issues not part of the original list). There was a great deal of diversity in the issues that respondents identified (see Table 5.1). The most highly ranked issues included community development,

\(^{30}\) Evan Castel, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Geography and Program in Planning at the University of Toronto assisted with this quantitative analysis.
community health, farming/agricultural issues, and food literacy/education. There were also “other” issues that were highly ranked by multiple respondents, including civic engagement and policy. There were some slight differences between the provinces: in British Columbia, respondents rated labeling and certification slightly below the overall average and rated the environment well above average; in Manitoba, respondents rated farming/agriculture and academic/research well above the overall average; and, in Nova Scotia, respondents rated labeling and certification slightly above the overall average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Ranked</th>
<th>Middle Ranked</th>
<th>Lowest Ranked</th>
<th>“Other” Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>community development, community health, distribution and marketing, environmental, farming/agricultural, food literacy/education, food security, food sovereignty</td>
<td>academic/research, anti-hunger, anti-poverty, consumer choice, food safety</td>
<td>agritourism, charity, fishing, farm workers rights, labeling and certification, regional/global trade</td>
<td>civic engagement, climate change, hunting/game meat, preserving heritage/culture, policy, school food, sustainable infrastructure, traditional/wild foods and indigenous rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The popular education workshops also revealed a high level of diversity within the types of activities in which AFIs in each province were involved. In the workshops, small groups of participants created a picture of how their communities were being impacted by the food system

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31 The ranking system was based on the overall responses from the survey question. The chart’s categories represent the clustering of respondents that identified an issue as very strong or strong. The range of percentages in each category is: “highest ranked” 75.2%-92.7%; “middle ranked” 55%-69%; and, “lowest ranked” 33.3%-45.9%. Issues listed in the “additional work” category are those identified by more than one survey respondent.
using a *What's Happening Chart*. Participants discussed and posted their ideas about the barriers and opportunities for implementing community food security (CFS) in their communities (see *Chapter 3’s Popular education workshops* for a more detailed discussion on the workshops).

From the charts that were produced, there were far more cross-provincial similarities around the barriers to CFS (i.e. the “decreasing CFS” chart; see Table 5.2a) than opportunities for CFS (i.e. the “increasing CFS” chart; see Table 5.2b). This suggests that there may be more consensus around the challenges (especially at the national and global levels) rather than the solutions. For example, in British Columbia there was more focus on issues concerning Indigenous populations and fisheries. In Manitoba, many of the concerns and solutions focused on the relationship between Indigenous, northern and southern populations. In Ontario, there was a significant amount of discussion focusing on urban-rural relations, access to land, and diversity issues.

The diversity of issues being addressed among network actors was also reflected in the follow up interviews. Describing a general shift observed in the non-profit sector, a director of an Ontario-based AFI explained, “We are part of a new generation of food sector organizations that each focus on one piece of the bigger puzzle. We are going to do what we do well and work with others in a complementary fashion.” In a similar vein, a volunteer coordinating a sustainable agriculture initiative in Manitoba explained, “We are one little piece of this food movement. The work that we are doing is complemented by the work of everyone else. As we begin to understand what this transformation looks like, we can understand how all the pieces fit together.”

Overall, the responses regarding the kinds of work AFIs were involved with across the four provinces had some similarities; however, the extensive list of issues identified makes it difficult to conclude that there is any one central issue or approach favoured within the networks.
In addition, the issues of greatest importance vary slightly by province, suggesting that either the network’s context, or its history, or both, has an influence on issue identification (for a discussion of the provincial context, see Chapter 4).

In the survey, respondents were asked to describe the nature of their relations with other AFIs in the province. The responses were summarized into six emergent categories and are shown in Table 5.3, which provides the percentage of responses in each category. The most identified type of relationship was structural/organizational support (31% of respondents). Responses in this category included the overlap of individuals through joint membership and/or sitting on the executive boards and steering committees of each other’s organizations, and existing organizations providing guidance and support in the establishment of other organizations. Illustrative of these types of relationships, an AFI representative in Nova Scotia explained, “At one point I was sitting on five different steering committees. It was an interesting moment of seeing how my work has had some impact across organizations.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>Ecological Sustainability</th>
<th>Community Health</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• income disparity</td>
<td>• contamination of natural resources</td>
<td>• lack of food literacy (i.e. how to shop, cook, grow)</td>
<td>• trade agreements</td>
<td>• expectation that food should be cheap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• speculation (land, food)</td>
<td>• climate change</td>
<td>• lack of food as commodity</td>
<td>• corporate concentration (i.e. land aggregation, oligopoly, market power)</td>
<td>• loss of traditional knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• export oriented food production</td>
<td>• corporate agribusiness agenda</td>
<td>• poverty</td>
<td>• land privatization</td>
<td>• advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• free trade</td>
<td>• export oriented food production</td>
<td>• medical system</td>
<td>• genetically modified food</td>
<td>• lack of innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• little food related knowledge/skills</td>
<td>• food as commodity</td>
<td>• loss of small producers</td>
<td>• loss of traditional knowledge</td>
<td>• commodification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• commodification</td>
<td></td>
<td>• separation between food and health</td>
<td>• over-regulation</td>
<td>• lack of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• colonialism</td>
<td></td>
<td>• lack of time</td>
<td>• broken supply management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of culturally appropriate and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local diet for northern peoples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cost of food in rural grocery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• access to land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of affordable housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• income disparities</td>
<td>• inadequate policy and regulations</td>
<td>• lack of access to food</td>
<td>• lack of access to people in power</td>
<td>• public acceptance of a broken food system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of food knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• loss of food knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• lack of information</td>
<td>• lack of unified action of the food movement</td>
<td>• civil society's lack of experience doing policy work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• no food policy</td>
<td>• hidden cost of food production</td>
<td>• lack of food policy</td>
<td>• corporate oligopoly</td>
<td>• cost of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• corporate agribusiness agenda</td>
<td>• centralization of processing</td>
<td>• loss of food knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• problems with regulatory systems</td>
<td>• loss of wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate labour laws</td>
<td>• inadequate laws</td>
<td>• BC</td>
<td>• &quot;vote with your fork&quot; reproduces inequality</td>
<td>• little financing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• access to land</td>
<td>• lack of access to farmland</td>
<td>• MB</td>
<td>• subsidies for industrial crops</td>
<td>• small scale farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• racism (i.e. residential schools)</td>
<td>• externalized environmental services</td>
<td>• ON</td>
<td>• &quot;intellectual property&quot; of seeds</td>
<td>• unclear who is responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of supportive housing policy</td>
<td>• no incentive for small and unconventional farmers</td>
<td>• NS</td>
<td>• the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement</td>
<td>• alienation of traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate social assistance rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• ON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/Provincial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• limited food policy work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of comprehensive food policy</td>
<td>• limited infrastructure (e.g. cold storage, value added, processing, abattoirs)</td>
<td>• broken supply management</td>
<td>• broken supply management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• poverty (access to affordable food)</td>
<td>• limited connection to producers</td>
<td>• limited food policy</td>
<td>• insecure and inadequate food access and distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate social assistance and</td>
<td>• pesticides and pollution</td>
<td>• over abundance of pre-processed food</td>
<td>• over-regulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>income security</td>
<td>• lack of food knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• cultural norms</td>
<td>• local food production bogged down in policy/law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of knowledge and skills</td>
<td>• BC</td>
<td>• lack of infrastructure</td>
<td>• access to land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• no ongoing funding for programs</td>
<td>• decrease in fish stocks</td>
<td>• discrimination between people</td>
<td>• limited food policy work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• BC</td>
<td>• land use and food integrity (e.g. moose, goose, fish, water)</td>
<td>• BC</td>
<td>• NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• culture of individuality</td>
<td>• ON</td>
<td>• climate change</td>
<td>• food consumption seen as individual issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• social supports engender dependency</td>
<td>• lack of farmland protection</td>
<td>• advertising</td>
<td>• &quot;voting with your dollar&quot; is inadequate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• high cost alternatives vs.</td>
<td>• reliance on intern for labour</td>
<td>• MB</td>
<td>• no inter-ministerial collaboration (lack of political will)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accessibility of food for all</td>
<td>• food safety policies</td>
<td>• groups working in isolation</td>
<td>• BC</td>
<td>• lack of access to transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• food deserts</td>
<td>• land use policies</td>
<td>• disparity in food costs in North</td>
<td>• over-regulation</td>
<td>• individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of affordable housing</td>
<td>• lack of access to land for community use</td>
<td>• flawed education system</td>
<td>• ON</td>
<td>• corporate control of public consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of affordable childcare</td>
<td>• lack of support for CFS programs</td>
<td>• lack of support for CFS programs</td>
<td>• ON</td>
<td>• lack of affordable housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• few good jobs</td>
<td>• availability of culturally appropriate foods</td>
<td>• lack of transportation</td>
<td>• NS</td>
<td>• lack of local food distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NS</td>
<td>• lack of nutrition knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cost/lack of transportation</td>
<td>• inadequate nutrition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of food security</td>
<td>• no inter-ministerial collaboration (lack of political will)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2a: What decreases community food security.
Table 5.2b: What increases community food security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>Ecological Sustainability</th>
<th>Community Health</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair trade</td>
<td>seed saving projects</td>
<td>urban agriculture</td>
<td>fair trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning from social movements in the Global South</td>
<td>micro-lending</td>
<td>food boxes</td>
<td>resistance against free trade</td>
<td>farmworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food justice</td>
<td>revitalizing animal species and seed varieties</td>
<td>dissemination of information through the internet</td>
<td>multi-stakeholder coops</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Campesina</td>
<td>linking small-scale farmers</td>
<td>intersections of food, health and environment</td>
<td>global campaigns (i.e. water as human right, alternative distribution, anti-GMOS, boycott)</td>
<td>consumers willing to pay the real price for food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food charters</td>
<td>international agreements (e.g. organic standards)</td>
<td>cooperatives (food and others)</td>
<td>new media and communication technologies</td>
<td>values (cooperation, honesty, integrity, inclusiveness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair trade</td>
<td>fair wages/conditions for farmers</td>
<td>food policy (charters, People’s Food Policy)</td>
<td>People’s Food Policy</td>
<td>increased media attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsidized food programs</td>
<td>People’s Food Policy</td>
<td>food-focused initiatives impacting people and systems</td>
<td>Food Secure Canada</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Food Policy</td>
<td>restorative agriculture</td>
<td>public demand for organic/local food</td>
<td>increased food-education</td>
<td>increasing food knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Secure Canada</td>
<td>food recovery</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>food education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eco-certifications</td>
<td>100 mile diet</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td>increased food-policy and programs</td>
<td>community-level support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intergenerational knowledge</td>
<td>urban/gorilla agriculture</td>
<td>on</td>
<td>increased rural/remote self-reliance</td>
<td>collaborative movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food central to spirit and culture</td>
<td>climate change realities</td>
<td>ON</td>
<td>cross-sector partnerships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>farm organizations raising voice at the political level</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td>interest in lost culinary arts (i.e. canning, fermenting)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job opportunities in agriculture</td>
<td>cooperatives</td>
<td>on</td>
<td>student nutrition program work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food cooperatives</td>
<td>ON</td>
<td></td>
<td>procurement policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing policy work</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td></td>
<td>education and training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food policy work</td>
<td>policy work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food policy work</td>
<td>multifunctionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pay farmers for ecological goods and services</td>
<td>policy work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work with migrant farm workers</td>
<td>climate change realities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>farm organizations raising voice at the political level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national protests (e.g. Menserto)</td>
<td>cooperatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local/Provincial</strong></td>
<td>Aborginal knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food policy councils and charters</td>
<td>new markets for distribution and processing (CSAs, farmers’ markets, food boxes, cooperatives)</td>
<td>new markets for distribution and processing (CSAs, farmers’ markets, food boxes, cooperatives)</td>
<td>food policy councils and food charter</td>
<td>community education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government procurement policies</td>
<td>urban agriculture</td>
<td>urban agriculture</td>
<td>cooperatives</td>
<td>increased capacity of networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>market vouchers</td>
<td>seed saving</td>
<td>community kitchens</td>
<td>collaborative networks</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supports for new farmers</td>
<td>programs supporting new farmers</td>
<td>education (food literacy)</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Indigenous groups subsidize community food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>protection of agricultural land</td>
<td>community compost</td>
<td>community gardening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community kitchens and gardens</td>
<td>bee keeping</td>
<td>greening</td>
<td>increased knowledge of food issues in school system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentoring projects</td>
<td>farmer cooperatives</td>
<td>healthy baby groups</td>
<td>engaged politicians</td>
<td>ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lifestyle activism</td>
<td>school food policies</td>
<td>procurement policies</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>strong, diverse partnerships across sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public health authorities</td>
<td>local food policies</td>
<td>collective celebration</td>
<td>transition town movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutional purchasing</td>
<td>local food hubs</td>
<td>developing local infrastructure</td>
<td>education and awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>pay farmers for ecological goods and services</td>
<td>local food production bylaws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increased cooperation</td>
<td>new Community Food Centre</td>
<td>food hubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-inventing food banks</td>
<td>new Community Food Centre</td>
<td>network building and promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social enterprises</td>
<td>community supported fishing</td>
<td>university/academic support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community-based research</td>
<td>new Community Food Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>participatory food costing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new Community Food Centre</td>
<td>university/academic support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>university/academic support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The second most common type of relationship identified by respondents was *information exchange* (29% of respondents), which included regular verbal/face-to-face contact, providing education and training, attending conferences or events, subscribing to list-serves, and using an organization’s web site on a regular basis. Relationships that were identified less frequently by respondents included: *funding* (14%), which involved both monetary and in-kind contributions (e.g., sponsorship, use of space); *joint events* (10%) including projects, programs or campaigns; and, *shared resources* (10%) including sharing volunteers, material goods (e.g., food) and specific services or programs. The least identified types relationships were in the category of *joint promotions* (6%), which included collectively promoting awareness of a particular issue and joint advocacy. Overall, these results reveal that there is a broad range of relationships being developed within the networks. However, contrary to what might be expected from the literature, the provincial food networks do few joint promotions.

Survey respondents were also asked which institutional sector they had been in contact with most regularly in the past year. The options provided were non-profit (i.e. other organizations and/or voluntary groups), private (i.e. business or media), as well as the federal, provincial and municipal governments. The survey revealed that respondents were most regularly in contact with the non-profit and private sectors (see Figure 5.1). Contact was weakest...
with the federal government and stronger with provincial and municipal governments. Overall, these results reveal that, within the provincial networks, there is sustained contact with many institutional sectors. Multiple interviewees reinforced this finding by identifying important and sustained relationships across sectors, including with funders, other non-profits and community groups, small businesses, government departments, producer associations, and academic institutions.

Figure 5.1: Organizations had regular contact with these sectors in the past year

Scale and (de)centralization

The survey also asked at what scale the work of each organization was focused. Respondents were given five options and invited to choose all that apply. Averaging responses across provinces, focus was highest at the municipal (62%), neighbourhood (52%), and provincial (45%) levels, with decreasing focus at the national (22%) and global (11%) levels (see Figure 5.2). Thus, within each provincial network there is work occurring at multiple scales, with some considerable emphasis on local level activity. During interviews, respondents found it
difficult to make concrete distinctions between relationships by scale. For example, associations with provincial and federal level government offices and organizations were often described as local level partnerships due to geographical proximity. Further, it was difficult for some respondents to identify their focus as taking place at a particular scale. While many food initiatives are place-based, they have developed strategies that simultaneously work at multiple scales. These findings challenge traditional notions of scale as a fixed or pre-given, instead suggesting that scale is contingent and relational (see Brenner 2001).

**Figure 5.2: Scale of organizational work**

![Figure 5.2: Scale of organizational work](image)

Centrality was calculated from survey responses that identified other groups that each respondent was involved with most frequently and that they believed were most valuable to their organization for addressing food issues. The data was used to generate values of centrality, to create sociograms that illustrate the in-degree relations within each provincial network, and to identify which organizations were most central in each network. The network centralization scores reflect the number of direct links connecting an actor to others in the network and indicate the extent to which that actor is central to that network (Wasserman and Faust 1994). The higher
the centrality index (a descriptive statistic expressed as a percentage), the more specific actors “dominates or overshadow” the network (Wasserman and Faust 1994; see Figure 5.3a and 5.3b for an illustration).

**Figure 5.3: Understanding centrality**
*Figure 5.3a demonstrates a network with the highest centralization level possible, where the centre node has ties to all other actors in the network, but they do not have ties to each other (resulting in a centrality index of 100%). In contrast, the circle graph in Figure 5.3b illustrates a network where no actor is more central than any other actor (this would have a centrality index of 0%).*

Using UCINET, a network centrality index was generated for each provincial food network. Table 5.4 shows the centrality index for each of the provincial food networks. The values for each of the networks are extremely low in comparison to centralization scores in other studies (for example, see Wasserman and Faust 1994; Sandström and Rova 2010). This means that within all four provincial food networks there is extremely low centrality.

**Table 5.4: Network centralization index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Centralization Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>0.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data was also used to create sociograms that illustrate the in-degree relations within each provincial network (see Figures 5.4a, 5.4b, 5.4c, and 5.4d), and to identify which organizations were most central in each network.
Figure 5.4: Food network sociograms

Sociograms illustrate the connections among organizations; the provincial network associations are labeled.

Figure 5.4a: British Columbia food network sociogram

Figure 5.4b: Manitoba food network sociogram

Figure 5.4c: Ontario food network sociogram

Figure 5.4d: Nova Scotia food network sociogram
These sociograms all illustrate the low centrality and high level of interconnectivity in each of the provincial networks. Despite the overarching decentralization, a small number of organizations do have higher in-degree scores (representing the number of times they were named by other organizations) (see Table 5.5). Among these organizations are the PNOs that hold somewhat more central positions in each of the provincial. Other organizations with top in-degree scores come from various sectors: in British Columbia, top in-degree organizations are from the non-profit sector and the municipal government; in Manitoba and Ontario, top organizations are from the non-profit sector and the provincial government; and, in Nova Scotia, top in-degree organizations are from the provincial government, the non-profit sector and academic institutions. But, relative to the number of organizations in the network, no one organization emerged as being overly central in the networks.

Table 5.5: Top in-degree organizations in each province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Top in-degree organizations (number of times named)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Columbia Food Systems Network (9); Vancouver Coastal Health (5); Farm Folk City Folk (4); City of Vancouver (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Food Matters Manitoba (4); Province of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (16); FoodShare (14); FoodNet Ontario (8); The Stop Community Food Centre (8); Ontario Public Health (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Province of Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture (9); Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (8); Ecology Action Centre (7); Province of Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection (5); Community University Research Alliance: Activating Policy Change for Community Food Security (5); Nova Scotia Food Security Network (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the provincial research partners saw these sociograms, they expressed that the graphics resonated closely with their experiences and understandings of the network. Describing the network structure and pointing to the challenges ahead during the 2012 roundtable discussion
Lauren Baker commented:

We are constructing a new food system with new enterprise models, new forms of agriculture, and new ways of thinking about health and community engagement. Unlike a hub and spoke image, our networks are decentralized. Like scaffolding, there are nodes of connectivity and the power is decentralized vertically and horizontally. Running along those lines of scaffolding are the relationships. But it is difficult to build that scaffolding in an equitable way across the province and it’s even more difficult to do it across the country. As activities proliferate on the ground we need to find ways to make good use of resources across the decentralized networks.

In summary, these findings reveal that all four provincial networks have a high level of interconnectivity but are also extremely decentralized, with no actors who completely dominate the network. Despite the low centrality, there are a few key organizations that do hold a more central position in each provincial network. Interestingly, some of those more central organizations (besides the PNOs) are government bodies, blurring the lines between “social movement” and “governance”.

**Shared identity**

Social movements are said to exhibit a collective identity that constitutes the core of the movement networks. While identity links do not imply homogeneity, they establish a sense of belongingness and bound the network. According to the network survey, an overwhelming majority (97%) of respondents identified as part of a “food movement” (see Figure 5.5), despite the de-centralization of the networks and diversity of aims. This sentiment was also reflected in numerous comments during the interviews, for example:

There is a food movement that is increasing awareness of where our food comes from, what’s in it, and whether it is healthy or produced under good labour and environmental standards . . . That food movement is real and it has longevity
because it is founded on the fundamental needs and desires of people to talk about environmental sustainability (AFI representative, British Columbia).

[The food movement is about] people connecting, talking, coming from different places but all sharing a certain kind of passion and belief about the current food system and the need for change (PNO representative, Manitoba).

We are part of a food movement, that’s my sense and that’s what we hear from the community. They feel change. To me, that is part of a movement (AFI representative, Ontario).

A food movement is sort of bubbling up out of the ground in all different walks of life . . . That food movement is real, it is alive and well and it has longevity. It is more than an aberration – it is a long-term trend because it is founded on the fundamental needs and desires of people (AFI representative, Nova Scotia).

This suggests that despite having different features from typical social movement networks as identified in previous studies, respondents still self-identify as being part of a collective movement.

**Figure 5.5. Response to the question: is your organization part of the food movement?**

![Chart showing response percentages for different provinces.](chart)

**Discussion**

This analysis of organizational relationships in provincial food networks reveals a dynamic set of relations that cross sectors, scales and geographies. The data demonstrates that within the provincial networks, different types of work are being done, diverse types of
relationships are being established, contact is occurring between multiple sectors, and work is being focused at multiple scales. In addition, the provincial networks were extremely decentralized, even though the majority of AFIs identified as being connected to a collective food movement. Reflecting on these features of provincial food networks in relation to the literature on social movement networks and assemblages can help us to better understand these networks and what their organizational structures could mean for their future success.

Returning to the three common features of networks as described by Diani (2011; also Diani and Bison 2004), social movement networks are generally seen to be: (a) in conflict with a clearly identified social or political opponent; (b) engaged in sustained collective projects as part of a formal, centralized network; and (c) exhibiting a long-term sense of collective identity, common goals and shared beliefs. However, the AFI networks described here did not seem to share a common target or single objective, and included alliances across public and private sectors and with different branches of government. Interestingly, the range of goals and lack of clearly articulated “demands” seen here are similar to findings from studies of other recent social mobilizations such as the Occupy (Juris, 2012), autonomous media (Langois Dubois 2005), and the global justice movements (Escobar 2004; Graeber 2004). The organizations within each provincial network described here were also linked in many different ways, not always around projects. While some organizations within the provincial food networks did identify participation in collective action (e.g., information exchange, joint promotion) as part of their networking activity, it was not the most dominant type of relation across all four provincial networks. Many of the types of relations most identified in the four provincial networks are what both Diani (1992a; 1992b) and Saunders (2007) have called “informal” or “weak” relations. And, while results did reveal that the majority of respondents identified as part of a food movement, this was not accompanied by overarching agreement on particular goals and beliefs. In fact, the results
highlight the variety of work being done, the diversity of relationships being established, the contacts occurring with multiple institutions and sectors, and the decentralized nature of the network, all of which is somewhat inconsistent with the sense of collective identity posited by social movement theorists to be indicative of a strong social movement network.

Based on the discussion above, the provincial food networks would likely be considered nascent according to some social movement network theory. That is, while a collective identity has clearly been developed, other elements of the networks would not be considered fully formed – in particular, they have not yet coalesced around a common target or a shared project. Indeed, these elements of AFI networks could be interpreted by some as a failure to effectively structure and/or institutionalize the movement (Saunders 2007). But is this really the case? Are we waiting for something to happen in these food networks to drive them to maturity, or is their structure already suited not only to their function but also to effectively achieving their (admittedly amorphous) goals? In many ways, it is too early to tell: the “food movement”, like other recent social movements, is still relatively new, and so the long term ability to create meaningful and lasting social change is as yet unproven. At the same time, evidence of a growing and increasingly powerful food movement (Allen 2004; Wekerle 2004; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009; Starr 2010; Holt-Giménez 2011; Wittman et al. 2011) suggests that something is already working to enhance the movement’s reach. Therefore, it is important not to assume that the movement is embryonic based on particular normative assumptions about network processes, but rather to accept the possibility of more diverse, dynamic network forms that are grounded in the particular cultural and political context from which they emerge (see Escobar 2008; Escobar and Osterweil 2010).
The data suggest that the provincial AFI networks are more consistent with representations of assemblages. That is, the networks described here can be characterized as interminable, self-organized networks of diverse actors constituted through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. Within the networks, membership in a particular group was not mutually exclusive, and organizations embraced a range of approaches in their work and collaborated with many different organizations and sectors. Through the networks, organizations came into contact with others who might influence their strategic direction (as in Kumar 2010), but complete consensus was not seen or even expected. Importantly, the literature on assemblages suggests that networks with this structure are not necessarily “emerging” or somehow incomplete; while the networks themselves are dynamic (and so are likely to undergo ongoing processes of (re)organization), the assemblage perspective argues that complex systems (like those found in the natural world) are likely to function well (and perhaps better) even in the absence of clear leaders. In other words, what looks like confusion and chaos to some observers may actually be a functioning, albeit complex social movement.

So what are the implications of these findings in relation to social mobilization for food system transformation and broader social change? First, taking these results seriously demands a more fluid and organic understanding of the kinds of activities taking place within social movement networks. On a practical level, seeing AFI networks as assemblages would imply that groups holding more centralized roles do not necessarily need to consolidate actors into more internally consistent and hierarchical organizational forms, and possibly may do more harm than good in the attempt. Rather than seeking to create a stronger collective mission, these organizations could continue to create bridges between organizations and encourage collaborative projects and innovative ideas and approaches. In this context, diverse network
relations could support wider information diffusion, since a broad array of links affords actors with a variety of information sources (Hartman and Johnson 1989). At the same time, we need to more thoroughly explore the tensions between embracing complexity and building solid foundations and institutions to “scale up” (Johnston and Baker 2005) social change work. Specifically, this will have a direct impact on the way that the provincial network organizations work to support and maintain the assemblage without reverting to centralized structures also requires further examination. These questions surrounding the role of the PNOs are explored further in Chapter 6.

Second, these findings require that we wrestle more substantively with the ways that diverse interests come together through everyday practice, without ideological coherence as a necessary precondition. This diversity can pose significant challenges for building stronger networks. However, it also widens traditional notions of what constitutes membership in a social movement (i.e. beyond civil society), thereby creating new political opportunities. For example, the data shows that the food networks have built close ties with the state and private sector as key allies. This also suggests that a richer understanding of social movements likely includes exploring the relations beyond a binary (i.e. radicle vs. complicit) perspective (see for example Jakobsen 1998; Goodman et al. 2012). In fact, in recent reflections on AFI networks, Goodman et al. (2012) suggest that networks that “focus on forging communities of shared values are intrinsically inequalitarian, because they are based on a single world view” (156). They go on to assert that, “Practitioners of reflexive food politics work to change the world via . . . civic modes that embrace different perspectives and worldviews without imposing a frame of ‘shared values’ on others” (157). This implies that open, relatively unbounded and heterogeneous networks might play an important role in the realization of a transformative food politics that seeks to fundamentally restructure not just how we eat but also how we structure social relations.
Finally, conceptualizing food networks as dynamic, evolving and unpredictable also means that they cannot be fully controlled. However, actors are not powerless. Holding assemblages together takes considerable effort (Li 2007; McFarlane 2009) and by better understanding network processes, actors can gain key insights about ways to push towards systemic transformation. Other studies have highlighted the importance of networks as both instrumental and prefigurative, suggesting that activists create networks to facilitate concrete political interventions “while generating decentralized network forms that ‘prefigure’ the utopian worlds they are struggling to create” (Juris 2008: 9; see also Schlosberg 1999; Graeber 2002). With respect to AFIs, studies have suggested that their activities are often attempts to develop and illustrate progressive forms of social organization (Kloppenburg and Hassanein 2006; Levkoe 2006; Wilson 2012), and also that food networks’ openness and diversity is an important political device (Goodman et al. 2012). In this context, the outcome of social mobilization in the transforming food system – while important – is not the only measure of a social movement’s success. The questions surrounding the ways that networks contribute towards transforming the food system are explored further in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

In summarizing the results from the survey, interviews and popular education workshops, this chapter raises questions about how well conventional social movement network analysis can explain certain facets of recent network organization. While there are no easy – or immediate – answers to the questions raised by this study, I have demonstrated that the analytic of assemblages may help to enhance existing social movement network theory and practice.
Contemporary forms of mobilization have real and direct impacts for AFIs, and results can plausibly be extended to other forms of organizing for environmental and social goals. As this chapter has demonstrated, actors will need to make tactical and strategic decisions based on heterogeneous and emergent qualities of network organization and structure. I also assert (following Escobar and Osterweil 2010) that network analyses of new social movements need to develop greater sensitivity to how network structure and function might change as a result of broader (and/or localized) dynamics in the socio-political contexts from which specific movements emerge. While this study may not be representative of all food activities in the food networks, it is an important place to begin unpacking the elusive concept of the “food movement,” which future research will undoubtedly advance.

Analyzing networks as assemblages helps to visualize and understand that initiatives with diverse goals and approaches can work together without ideological coherence. We can’t know exactly what a future food system will look like, but recognizing and validating a plurality of experiences and accounting for the multi-scalar nature of the networks “can provide a strategic depth which totalizing discourses of capital, power and total revolution often foreclose” (Kumar 2010: 21). Collaborative processes of experimentation that embrace contradictions and take reflexive action through networks are an important part of pushing the logics of system transformation. Thus, while the structure of networks as assemblages presents challenges for social mobilization, it also opens new opportunities for political transformation. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of the PNOs in their attempt to support and maintain network mobilization. As actors with more central positions in the network, I explore their role as network weavers (Stevenson et al. 2008) and attempts to bring together organizations across sectors, scales and geographies within a decentralized and heterogeneous network structure.
Chapter 6
Forging Connections and Sustaining the Networks: The Role of Provincial Network Organizations

*Networks are tricky, flexible, liquid and obscure in the way that water slips through your fingers. There is a lot of strength in that but it means we need to understand the nature of what holds those networks together even more in order to maintain those networks so they serve us in the long run.*

~ Amanda Sheedy, Program Coordinator, Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (from Building Strong and Effective Networks, a session at the Bring Food Home Conference, Peterborough Ontario, October 28, 2011)

In the previous chapter, I examined the activities, structures and relations within the four case study networks and demonstrated that the concept of assemblages helps us understand new opportunities and challenges for network building. Evidence from the research indicated that within the provincial food networks, different types of work are being done, diverse types of relationships are being established, contact is occurring between sectors, and work is focused at multiple scales (see also Levkoe and Wakefield 2013). In addition, the networks were extremely decentralized, even though the majority of AFIs identified as being connected by participants as part of a collective “food movement”. Following from this, no organization was found to hold substantial control in any of the four networks. However, the provincial network organizations (PNO) all emerged as more-centralized actors with higher indegree scores (i.e., they were named by survey respondents as being valuable to their work). This is not surprising since the PNOs evolved from a perceived need to bring together local AFIs and foster collaboration by strengthening the networks (as described in Chapter 4).

In this chapter I examine the role of the PNOs in supporting network mobilization with a particular focus on the kinds of efforts being used to organize the different AFIs. In response to arguments that some applications of network analysis have neglected the role that actors play in
influencing the networks (see Chapter 2), I demonstrate that networking strategies are developed through deliberate efforts of the PNOs while also being heavily influenced by the context in which the participating AFI s are embedded. Using the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool draws particular attention to the ongoing efforts and resources necessary for linking together heterogeneous elements without central coordinating mechanisms. I empirically document that the PNOs, as network “weavers” (Stevenson et al. 2008), play an important strategic role in forging connections and sustaining the provincial food networks.

The chapter begins by drawing on scholarly literature that points to the roles organizations have typically played in sustaining social movements. Next, I draw on the provincial network survey, the interviews, site visits, and background information to examine the structures, roles and activities of the PNOs in each of the provincial food networks. I use the concept of network weavers (introduced in Chapter 2; also see Stevenson et al. 2008) to explore ways that the PNOs have established networking strategies that bring together AFI s from across sectors, scales and geographies, while at the same time encouraging the decentralized network structure and engaging difference. I identify three of the most common strategies across the case study provinces: 1) creating physical spaces that involve direct contact in particular places where AFI s meet face-to-face; 2) supporting virtual spaces where connections are mediated through different technologies; and, 3) strategically using different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects and to organize around and impact provincial level policy. I conclude by pointing to some key areas of contention that arise, and argue that addressing tensions must be a preemptive focus of the PNO’s efforts in order to sustain the network’s activity.
Social Movement Organizations and their Networking Strategies

In Chapter 2, I introduced the argument that some applications of network analysis inadequately conceptualize human agency, which can overlook the role that actors play in influencing networks (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Escobar 2008). I also pointed to literature (e.g., Li 2007; McFarlane 2009) that suggested an immense amount of energy and resources was necessary to sustain the coherence and functioning of networks. As a way to think through these efforts, I drew on Stevenson et al.’s (2008) concept of “weaver work” to describe efforts that aim to develop strategic and conceptual linkages among diverse initiatives through network building. In this chapter, I return to these principles of assemblages to explore the role of PNOs, as network weavers, in their attempts to foster and sustain the provincial food networks. Along with analyzing the structures of the networks (in Chapter 5), examining the way that PNOs support network mobilization contributes to a better understanding of how networks are a part of a transformative food politics. In this section I briefly review the literature that points to the role of organizations in sustaining social movements and the ways particular networking strategies have been conceptualized.

Social movement organizations

The study of organizations that support social mobilization dates back to the 1960s. Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash were among the first to bring the idea of social movement organizations (SMOs) to the forefront of the scholarly literature as deserving special consideration. In a seminal article, they discussed SMOs as unique entities and attempted to show the range of factors that influenced their viability including the structures, processes, and pressures both internal and external to the organization (Zald and Ash 1966). Constituted by a diverse range of individuals and organizations, Zald and Ash identified SMOs as different from
traditional non-profit organizations through two unique interrelated features. First, as opposed to providing a particular service, their mandates aimed to change or restructure individuals and/or the broader society. Second, they showed that participants in SMOs were primarily motivated by positive incentive structures, such as fulfilling specific values, enhancing solidarity through prestige or friendship, and at times providing material benefits. While there has been some debate about the kinds of organizations that should be classified as SMOs (see Lofland 1996), the PNOs discussed in this chapter fit well into McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) broad and inclusive view of SMOs as “a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (1218). For example, the four case study PNOs explicitly identify with the broad aims of supporting place-based AFIs, encouraging collaboration and working towards a healthy, ecological and just food system (as discussed in Chapter 4).

SMOs have been touted as important for sustaining movements over time, especially during periods of extreme high and low activity; however, there have been differing opinions regarding the degree of formalization most beneficial for their success. For example, Piven and Cloward (1977) argued that SMOs should focus on mass insurgency rather than on building large-scale, bureaucratic organizations. Taylor (1989), on the other hand, points to the benefits of more prescribed organizational structures for preventing internal conflict and factionalism. Reviewing the benefits of differing levels of formalization, Staggenborg (2011) shows that more formalized SMOs with hierarchical decision-making structures and codified membership criteria have typically been more successful in accessing established political channels, at being recognized as a legitimate representative of a movement, and for sustaining ongoing interactions with diverse constituencies. Less formalized SMOs - managed by volunteers with few formal procedures or policies - tend to be more successful at tactical innovation since they are able to
mobilize quickly and adapt to emerging situations (Staggenborg 2011).

Overall, descriptions of SMOs have been somewhat ambiguous, taking on different meaning depending on the particular author and case study. Organizations engaged in social movements have been explained by a plurality of models (e.g. degree of formalization) and evolutionary trajectories (e.g. becoming more or less institutionalized or radicalized as they grow) (della Porta and Diani 2006). In general, the primary role of SMOs has been described as mobilizing individuals and other organizations towards action (Lofland 1996; Staggenborg 2011). In this chapter, I build on these descriptions of SMOs, to examine the PNOs as network weavers. From Stevenson et al. (2008), weaver organizations are actively involved in creating linkages that support the work of AFIs with different strategic orientations (i.e. warrior and builder- see Chapter 2). Weaver work can be preformed by a wide range of actors (e.g. grassroots coalitions, academics developing research and analysis, etc.) and is not limited to formal non-profit organizations. Like the efforts of SMOs, weaver work is “explicitly oriented towards movement building,” through outreach and organizing activities that bring together diverse actors (Stevenson et al. 2008: 47). In this chapter, I demonstrate that PNOs, as weavers, play an important strategic role in forging connections and sustaining the provincial food networks. To describe this role, I examine each PNO’s administrative and structural qualities and their efforts to develop a series of networking strategies to mobilize diverse AFIs within a heterogeneous and decentralized network structure. Before turning to the case studies, I briefly explain how I use the concept of “networking strategies”.

**Networking strategies**

A central focus for the PNOs has been an attempt to establish a series of networking
strategies that aim to bring together AFIs across sectors, scales and geographies. As opposed to network spaces as closed and contained, I understand networks to be engaged in the construction of relational space through *processes of interaction* between multiple actors, events and activities (Murdoch 2006; Thrift 2009). This approach follows from Harvey (1996) who describes space as constituted by various (physical, biological, social, and cultural) processes that combine to create semi-permanent assemblages. Further, rather then space being bound by geographical scale - which is also constructed through relational processes (Brenner 2001) - I understand space to be open and engaged with other spaces and places. To describe the different kinds of network spaces constructed by the PNOs, I draw on Massey’s (1991) explanation of space as a “meeting place” where multiple relations interweave. As these relations meet, new relations are formed and new spatial identities come into being.

Following from this relational notion of space, human geographers have described the concept of scale as socially produced through struggle and as the outcome of activities and processes that contribute to spatially uneven and temporarily unfolding dynamics (Brenner 2001; Marston 2001). This perspective has been conceived in opposition to a more traditional notion of scale as fixed and ontologically pre-given. Neil Brenner (2001) writes of a “politics of scale” that refers to “the production, reconfiguration or contestation of particular differentiations, orderings and hierarchies *among* geographical scales” (512, emphasis in the original). As socio-spatial relations change, they produce a nested set of related spatial scales that define an arena of struggle where conflict is mediated and regulated and compromises are settled (Smith 1992; Swyngedouw 1997). Thus, scales are understood to be the product of strategies pursued by different social actors with a particular agenda. In relation to social mobilization, scholars have argued that an analysis of scale must pay attention to state formations as well as resistance efforts of social movements that deploy and construct scale (Miller 2000; Wolford 2004). Movement
actors that reflexively consider their actions in relation to a politics of scale may discover new opportunities to create and renegotiate activities in relation to the different scales of action. Arguing for social movements to consider these kinds of scalar strategies, Swyngedouw (1997) writes, “the politics of scale are surely messy, but they ought to take centre stage in any successful emancipatory political strategy” (160). The concept of scale has been a central focus for scholars analyzing the food system (Allen et al. 2003b; Hinrichs 2003; Born and Pucell 2006), and specifically, the need for AFIs to use scale strategically to scale-out their activities to other localities and scale-up to address structural concerns (Johnston and Baker 2005).

In this chapter, I examine the relational dynamics among PNOs and the AFIs to better understand the kinds of networking strategies that are being developed and the way they are used to encourage food system transformation. Likewise, a better understanding of how the networking strategies are developed can provide insight into the strengths and opportunities for improvement of existing processes of social mobilization. Beyond studying the rise of social movements, human geographers have added to the scholarly literature by examining the ways that space, place and scale affect social mobilization (for example, see Slater 1997; Miller 2000; Miller and Martin 2003; Wolford 2004). In the remainder of this subsection, I identify three particular examples that inform my analysis of the PNO’s efforts.

First, Walter Nicholls’ (2009) research addresses the ways that the geographical constitution of social movement networks plays a key role in coordinating a movement’s activities. Focusing on global social movement networks, Nicholls describes the way that sustained interaction between distant allies embedded in place come together to form a distinct “social movement space”. His argument builds on Doreen Massey’s (2004) conception of space as the sum of concrete place-based activities, assembled unevenly through relational networks.
Nicholls asserts that the coming together of diverse activists into a “social movement space” are impacted by a set of new social dynamics, distinct from those found in the individuals places that constitute it. In other words, the resulting dynamics are more than the sum of the individual parts. He also points to a number of mechanisms that facilitate the development of relationships between diverse activists. For example, these may include the mediation of a third party broker, meetings and events that serve as important “contact points”, and communication technologies that support ongoing contact between distant allies. Nicholls concludes that an ideal network structure

is both internally well structured and open to contacts with multiple others in the vicinity. Such a network is strong enough to convince activists to mobilize their valuable resources to risky political enterprises and open enough to circulate innovative ideas between diverse groups (91).

In a similar vein, Paul Routledge (2003) articulates the idea of “convergence space,” as a kind of networking space that is constituted by the interactions and relationships of multiple different groups. Using the case study of the Peoples Global Action (PGA), an international grassroots network opposing neoliberal globalization, Routledge describes how networking spaces facilitate a “diverse, contested coalition” of place-based organizations “on a variety of multi-scalar terrains that include both material places and virtual spaces” (334). Within these spaces, activists embody particular experiences that have been formed and nurtured in the places where they originate. Within networking spaces, activists also have an opportunity to share their experiences, learn from others and undertake collective action. Routledge identifies a series of mechanisms used by the PGA to weave together place-based efforts that include facilitating spaces for communication (e.g. websites, newsletters and face-to-face meetings), coordination (e.g. organizing conferences) and resource mobilization (e.g. people, finances and skills). He also recognizes that the networking spaces are comprised of contested social relations, as different groups articulate and negotiate potentially conflicting goals, ideologies and strategies. However,
Routledge argues that the interactions and negotiations within the networking spaces prefigure “a participatory way of practicing effective politics, articulating the (albeit imperfect) ability of heterogeneous movements to be able to work together without any single organization or ideology being in a position of domination” (345).

In a third example of the ways that networking strategies can construct spaces through processes of interaction, Chesters and Welsh (2005) adopt the concept of “plateau”\(^{32}\) to describe “events of temporary but intensive network stabilization where the rhizomatic substance of the movement(s) – groups, organizations, individuals, ideologies, cognitive frames, etc. – are simultaneously manifest and reconfigured” (194). They apply this concept to their analysis of global social movements “as a descriptor for the process of intensive networking in material and immaterial spaces that occurs around nodal points of contestation or deliberation, such as protest events or social fora” (192). While networking often occurs through face-to-face interaction, they show that interconnections can also emerge through computer-mediated communications. Further, Chesters and Welsh posit that networking can provide the opportunity to recognize similarities and express differences between actors from across sectors, scales and geographies.

These three examples all express the idea that networks can act as a meeting place constructed through processes of interaction between actors, events and activities. After briefly pointing to the methods used in this chapter, I examine the administrative structure and role of the PNOs, and then turn to the specific networking strategies they use in an effort to foster and sustain the assemblages.

\(^{32}\) The concept of plateau was originated by Bateson (1973) and later developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987).
Methods

In this chapter I draw on the provincial network survey, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, site visits, and background information. From the survey, AFIs were asked to describe the relationship with their respective PNO using a five-point scale and in an open-ended question. The interviews conducted with selected AFIs were used to follow up on these general responses. Background data was also used in this chapter, collected directly from organizational websites and from internal and external documents provided by the PNOs and AFIs. Further, the analysis draws on the popular education workshops and my experiences participating in the regional gatherings and visiting specific projects in each of the provinces (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of the methods used).

Network Weavers: The Administrative Structures of Provincial Network Organizations

In Chapter 4, I discussed the geographic and historical context of the PNOs and their development from an expressed need to bring together diverse AFIs with a focus on food system issues. Like the networks, the PNOs are not unitary wholes but an assemblage of individuals, organizations, approaches, interests, knowledge and material resources. While the degree to which this is the case varies by province, in most cases, the PNOs do not act unilaterally, but spend a significant amount of time and energy negotiating with, and responding to their constituents. To elucidate the roles of the PNOs within the provincial networks, I begin by identifying their particular administrative structures and capacities and then describe their strategic positioning as weavers in the provincial food networks (Table 6.1 provides a summary of the PNO’s administrative structures and roles).
Administrative structures

The development of the four PNOs each reflects the historical and geographical context of the different provinces (in Chapter 4 I describe these different contexts). The administrative structures of the PNOs have also evolved from within this context and have adapted in response to the evolution of the provincial food networks (see Chapter 5 for more discussion on the constitution and structure of the networks). In this subsection, I briefly highlight some key features of the PNO’s administrative structures.

The British Columbia Food Security Network (BCFSN) is registered as a non-profit organization with an active board of directors made up of AFI representatives from across the province. It operates as a membership-based organization open to anyone in the province who agrees to its mandate and democratic operating principles (see Table 6.1). While there is a sliding-scale membership fee, no one is excluded from becoming a member. The BCFSN is run completely through volunteer labour, with the exception of hiring a gathering coordinator on a short-term contract each year. The majority of the annual operating expenses are derived from the annual gathering with membership fees and small grants making up the remainder of the budget. After much debate, the BCFSN membership decided not to pursue charity status because members felt it would place too many limitations on advocacy and political work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mandate</th>
<th>Organizational Type</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Roles in Network</th>
<th>Main Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia Food Systems Network</td>
<td>To work together to eliminate hunger and create food security for all residents of British Columbia</td>
<td>registered non-profit organization</td>
<td>volunteer board of directors</td>
<td>convenes a provincial network, articulates desired policy changes, participates in other networks</td>
<td>annual provincial gathering, multiple listservs (geographical and thematic), website, Indigenous Food Sovereignty Working Group, elections toolkit, Food Policy Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Matters Manitoba</td>
<td>Food Matters Manitoba engages Manitobans toward healthy, fair, sustainable food for all</td>
<td>registered non-profit, charitable organization</td>
<td>volunteer board of directors, 7 paid staff (2 permanent and 5 on long-term contracts)</td>
<td>convenes, facilitates, incubates, and participates in multiple provincial networks, articulates desired policy changes, coordinates working groups</td>
<td>Manitoba Food Charter, annual Growing Local Conference, annual Grow North Conference, listserv, website, research and policy reports, 40+ community food projects, elections campaign, Our Food Our Health Our Culture, Dig In Manitoba, Northern Healthy Food Initiative, FoodShare Coop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming</td>
<td>Sustain Ontario is working towards a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable</td>
<td>operates as a non-profit, charitable organization under the auspices of Tides Canada</td>
<td>2 paid co-chairs, advisory council, steering committee, 6 paid staff (2 permanent and 4 on long-term contracts)</td>
<td>convenes a provincial network, facilitates collaboration, articulates desired policy changes, participates in other networks, coordinates working groups</td>
<td>bi-annual Bring Food Home Conference (co-organizer), research and publications, newsletter, website, Good Food Ideas, elections toolkit, multiple working groups, regional food events, Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia Food Security Network</td>
<td>To ensure Nova Scotians have access to safe, locally produced, nutritious foods, support sustainable food systems, and contribute to the implementation of Healthy Eating Nova Scotia</td>
<td>informal coalition</td>
<td>volunteer coordinating committee</td>
<td>convenes a provincial network, facilitates collaboration, articulates broader policy changes, facilitates projects, participates in other networks</td>
<td>provincial gatherings (2007, 2009, 2013), core team member for Moving the Food Movement initiative, Thought About Food? tools (workbook, DVD, policy lens food costing reports and advocacy) on food security and influencing policy, Participatory Food Costing and Activating Change Together for Community Food Security, research and publications, website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Food Matters Manitoba (FMM) was originally established with the purpose of developing a food charter that would move beyond the municipal-level to include rural producers and communities from the North. Once established, the charter became a guiding principle for FMM as an independent non-profit organization to bring together the nascent provincial food network (for a history of the Manitoba Food Charter and FMM’s development see Chapter 4). The organization is overseen by a board of directors that is made up of food system stakeholders including representatives from urban and rural communities, the North, and provincial and federal governments. Relative to the other case study PNOs, FMM has the most formal organizational structure with the largest budget and most paid staff. FMM also coordinates over forty community food projects ranging from food literacy and school programs to urban agriculture and community development (see Table 6.1). Through coordinating programs, FMM has been able to diversify its financial base. According to the most recent financial reports, over half of FMM’s revenue comes from provincial and federal government grants and the remainder from major foundations and local fundraising efforts.

While Ontario has seen some geographic and issue specific networks over the past few decades (e.g., the Ontario Public Health Association’s Food Security Working Group), Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming’s (Sustain Ontario) was established in 2008 through the impetus of the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation (for a history of Sustain Ontario see Chapter 4). Sustain Ontario is structured as a formal non-profit organization led by two co-chairs and an advisory council made up of thirty-five individuals representing a diverse array of AFIs (of which five act as the steering committee). There is also a paid director, a program manager, four part-time staff members, as well as significant volunteer support base (which includes numerous student interns). To reduce administrative pressures on staff, Sustain Ontario operates as a project of Tides Canada, a national charitable organization whose mission focuses
on environmental and social sustainability. Tides Canada incubates Sustain Ontario by providing human resources and financial management support. While Sustain Ontario’s steering committee has full control over the activities and decisions of the organization, the Tides Canada board takes on some governing, legal and fiduciary responsibility.

The Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) is governed by a coordinating committee of representatives from AFIs involved in food-related work from around the province. The NSFSN has an extremely flexible structure, meaning that it has no official membership criteria but takes partial responsibility for supporting and strengthening the provincial food network. In my discussions with representatives from the coordinating committee, members explained the deliberate decision to maintain an informal structure. In this respect, the NSFSN does not assume ownership of the network and has openly welcomed and actively supported other provincial and regional network initiatives. The majority of funding and support for the NSFSN has come from public health’s commitment to food security as one of four provincial health priorities (for more discussion on the relationship between the NSFSN and the province see Chapter 4). Further, the NSFSN has taken advantage of its broad-based academic, community and government partnerships to accomplish specific tasks. For example, the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council (NSNC), the Department of Health Protection and Promotion (DHPP), and its University partners have provided money and resources to the NSFSN for research and AFI programing.

Provincial network organizations as network weavers

While there are some differences in the administrative structures, a commonality among all of the PNOs is their positioning as weavers (Stevenson et al. 2008) with an aim to foster and
sustain the provincial food networks. While numerous geographic and issue specific food networks operate throughout the four case study provinces, the PNOs convene provincial-level networks focused on strengthening connections around food system work. For example, in British Columbia network members are separated by significant geographic distance. As a result, reducing isolation was identified by most AFIs as the primary role for the BCFSN. For example, one member explained,

> Coming from a remote community, I often feel unsupported and alone . . . Without other people who can help do the critical analysis and come up with the ideas and move things forward, it would be really hard, really unsustainable for me to be doing that work in my community. The network has become my support system.

In my discussions with AFIs throughout the province, the role of the BCFSN was described as both “fluid” and as “creating stability over time”. One AFI representative commented on the way the BCFSN “provides the space for people to work together” as opposed doing the work itself. As a networking organization, energy has been focused primarily on supporting members and facilitating interconnections as opposed to independent programming. It was also evident that the BCFSN had made substantial efforts to ground the network and establish continuity through organizing annual gatherings and coordinating numerous geographical and thematic listservs (I discuss these initiatives in more detail below).

As a network weaver, FMM incubates, convenes and participates in a number of regional food networks (i.e., the North End Food Security Network, the Winnipeg Food Policy Working Group). Most significant to this study, FMM hosts the Manitoba Food Security Network (MFSN), which serves as a forum for AFIs from across the province to connect, communicate, showcase their projects, and share resources. Speaking about the MFSN, staff explained that FMM is the only organization in Manitoba that has the capacity and reach to “bring together the different players that are working in isolation.” To date, FMM has used the
MFSN to host regular face-to-face meetings, sponsor educational brown bag lunch sessions, share information through an e-mail listserv, and facilitate the development of new partnerships, networks and projects. Describing FMM’s role, one of the MFSN members commented, “I see FMM as a strategic thinking organization that can bring groups together in a way that recognizes the value of different kinds of activities but also sees the need for coming together with a common voice and strategic approach.” Taking advantage of its experience, influence and resources, FMM has worked with AFIs to make connections between education, public health, nutrition, Indigenous peoples, and anti-poverty initiatives along with many other sectors.

Sustain Ontario has focused its work on creating opportunities for diverse AFIs with different perspectives to work together. A staff member suggested that while there is some commonality in the visions of participating AFIs, there is often little unanimity:

As a network, Sustain Ontario does not work on consensus. We can have members that are totally opposed to each other with different missions, as long as they are forwarding a sustainable food system in some way, shape or form. I think that is a really important part of how we are working as a networking organization, and that has allowed us to move forward without getting stuck. It allows us to build trust and relationships over time.

Not demanding consensus has been a strategic decision, which has attempted to create opportunities for AFIs to come together, engage in dialogue, and develop commonalities. Sustain Ontario articulates this organizational structure through the “constellation model,” described as an emergent governance structure that supports multi-organizational partnerships while maintaining participants’ autonomy (Surman and Surman 2008). In an attempt to balance coordination and facilitation in a decentralized network structure, the constellation model aims to create the conditions for the self-organization of working groups. According to Sustain Ontario, this structure “enables emergent leaders to take initiative, and identify and work on strategic activities that harness converging ‘mutual self interest’ as well as the expertise, time, and energy
of groups of people within the network” (Sustain Ontario 2013). This organizational model exemplifies weaver work since it is focused on developing strategic and conceptual linkages through network building.

The participatory action framework adopted by the NSFSN even prior to its establishment has been a commitment to ensure the active participation of multiple AFIs, especially those most affected by food insecurity (for a description of the NSFSN’s participatory action framework see Chapter 4). Describing its role as a network weaver, one AFI representative explained, “The NSFSN is the fertile ground that holds the space where other work can emerge. Without it we would not have kept provincial partnerships as strong and people as engaged.” One of the coordinating committee members explained the role of the NSFSN in a similar way other PNOs had been described, as a connector and not a unitary voice: “We are one piece of the larger puzzle – it is about being a hub and a connector for other work happening in the province. This is the role for the NSFSN, but not necessarily the provincial voice.”

Comparing the administrative structures and roles of the four PNOs reveals a number of similarities. For example, each of the PNOs has developed similar mandates that articulate a vision for a healthy, ecological and just food system (see Table 6.1). Further, the PNOs are all committed to bringing together diverse AFIs from different sectors within their province. The PNOs also exhibit some differences that reflect their particular historical and geographical context. For example, the BCFSN and the NSFSN are structured much less formally. As one of the most staffed and resourced PNOs, FMM coordinates a number of projects and programs as its primary activity. Sustain Ontario is the newest of the four PNOs and was established through decades of network mobilization and by the efforts of a charitable foundation. The NSFSN’s
work has had a strong connection to public health, receiving financial support as well as staff
time from nutritionists and dietitians in the province. Overall, the results from the research
suggest that the PNOs are all engaged in weaver work with the explicit goal to create a healthy,
ecological and just food system. In the next section, I examine the networking strategies used by
PNOs in attempts to bring together AFIs from across sectors, scales and geographies in the
context of a heterogeneous and decentralized network structure.

**Developing Networking Strategies**

Assuming the role of weavers within each of the provincial networks, PNOs have
developed a set of networking strategies that bring together a broad array of AFIs from across
sectors, scales and geographies. My approach to describing these networking strategies follows
from the literature presented earlier in this chapter: they are developed through processes of
interaction between multiple actors, events and activities (Murdoch 2006; Thrift 2009); they are
engaged with multiple actors at different scales (Brenner 2001); and, they act as a “meeting
place” where multiple relations interweave (Massey 1991). Analyzing the development of the
different networking strategies across the four provinces demonstrates how the PNOs are
positioned within the networks to foster and support collaboration. In this section I identify three
of the most common types of networking strategies across the case study provinces: 1) the
creation of physical spaces that involve direct contact in particular places where AFIs meet face-
to-face; 2) the development of virtual spaces where connections are mediated through different
 technologies; and, 3) the use of scalar strategies where AFIs use different levels of government
(i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects to organize around and impact
provincial level policy (Table 6.2 provides a summary of the initiatives that contribute to each of
these networking strategies). In general, the purpose of these networking strategies is to create
opportunities for building mutual-support, sharing experiences, and developing strategic
direction for action.

Table 6.2: Examples of provincial network organization-led initiatives that contribute to
networking strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Spaces (direct contact)</th>
<th>Virtual Spaces (technology-mediated)</th>
<th>Scalar Strategies (policy-related)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia Food Systems Network</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Annual gathering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Board of directors meetings</td>
<td>• 13 participatory listservs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Website</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teleconferences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Elections toolkit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Policy reports</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provincial deputations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Matters Manitoba</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Annual Growing Local conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Annual Grow North conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 40+ community food projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Northern Healthy Food Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meetings of the Manitoba Food Security Network and the Sustainable and Just Working Group</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Board of directors Meetings</td>
<td>• E-newsletter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Website</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manitoba Food Charter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research and policy reports</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Elections Toolkit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bi-annual Bring Food Home conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• City to Country Mobile conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Advisory/steering committee meetings</td>
<td>• E-newsletter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Blog</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Website</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Good Food Ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Webinars</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teleconferences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Elections toolkit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Policies from the Field working papers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ontario Local Food Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia Food Security Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provincial gatherings and other regional gatherings</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• FoodARC</td>
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<td>• ACT for CFS</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coordinating committee meetings</td>
<td>• E-Newsletter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Website</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• FoodARC website</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teleconferences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Thought About Food? and Policy Lens</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ACT for CFS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Support for the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council</td>
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</table>

Physical networking spaces

Physical networking spaces are constructed through the direct contact between AFIs in
particular places. The majority of PNO resources in all of the case study provinces are consumed
by the construction of these kinds of spaces. In interviews, AFIs unanimously described physical
networking spaces as the most valuable and desired. The most common way that physical networking spaces were constructed across the four provincial food networks was through provincial and regional gatherings coordinated by the PNOs. When I attended these gatherings, I experienced a series of dynamic environments that integrated social, educational and strategic processes of interaction. At times, the gatherings felt like a warm and comforting social event between old friends, and at others they had the energy of a major sporting event with people engaged in vociferous debates and strategizing for collective action. While the days were generally packed full of sessions, roundtables and workshops, the evenings always involved conviviality with good food and drink provided by local producers. The nature of the conferences differed in each province, but the common objectives were to share experiences between AFIs and to collectively reflect on their successes and challenges to improve future practice. From the surveys and among the AFIs I spoke with, there was overwhelming consensus that the physical networking spaces constructed through the interaction of participants at the provincial gatherings were a vital element in catalyzing the provincial food network. For example, the BCFSN’s gatherings were described as more than “merely a conference where people share information, experience, and ideas . . . its central purpose and focus was on strengthening the network” (BCFSN 2006: 3). Discussing the value of interaction in physical networking spaces, the 2005 BCFSN gathering report noted, “‘Networking’ in this context is not exchanging business cards but gaining a deep understanding of how our visions and goals are inter-connected” (BCFSN 2005: 4).

The BCFSN holds fairly small and intimate gatherings that alternate locations each year. Of the four provinces, it was the most informal gathering with programming that included interactive discussions, practical skill-building workshops, tours, as well as numerous social events. Participants expressed that the gatherings were deliberately designed to be peer-based (as
opposed to inviting experts that were external to the network) with a democratic, grassroots focus. The annual Growing Local conference in Manitoba was the largest gathering of the four provinces and in recent years, organizers have invited well-known keynote speakers (e.g. Winona LaDuke, Joel Salatin) that attracted a wide diversity of participants. Since 2007, FMM has also co-organized a separate gathering in the north that aims to bringing together Indigenous communities and service providers around food related issues. A FMM staff described this effort as “strengthening a network of northerners across thousands of kilometers.” In Ontario, the Bring Food Home biannual gatherings have been the most formal of the four provinces and have attracted a wide-range of AFIs as well as small-business leaders and government representatives. They have been organized as multi-day events with internationally renowned keynote speakers (e.g. Raj Patel, Mark Winne, Joel Salatin), workshops, lectures, tours, and strategic meetings. In Nova Scotia, provincial gatherings have been held more sporadically than the other three provinces. Recognizing the value of physical networking spaces, the NSFSN has directly supported a number of regional, provincial and national gatherings organized by other groups (e.g. Moving the Food Movement in 2009).

Within the provinces, I encountered some disagreement among AFIs about how formal the gatherings should be. In British Columbia for example, most members supported the peer-based grassroots focus, however, a number of AFI representatives wanted more opportunities to engage directly with professionals and decision-makers. Some members that worked for more institutionalized organizations (i.e. public health and large non-profits) commented that the BCFSN gatherings did not meet their professional needs and as a result they were not a priority. Some members from smaller organizations suggested that the gatherings could include more professional training and targeted strategic planning. Speaking about the limitations of the BCFSN gatherings, one member commented,
I need to be able to meet with people strategically and look at how to move things forward - what’s at the next level? From my experience in community development, most of the problems aren’t caused at the local level, and thus, the solutions aren’t only at the local level. In an ideal situation there would be opportunities here to move things through different levels.

In contrast, at the 2011 Bring Food Home conference, a much more formal gathering, some participants felt there needed to be more focus on expertise internal to the network rather than bringing keynote speakers from other places.

Another common initiative used by the PNOs to construct physical networking spaces was face-to-face meetings that brought together AFI leaders. In all the provinces, the PNO leadership represented a range of groups from different sectors and geographies within the food system. Meetings were an opportunity for sharing experiences and engaging in strategic dialogue (similar to the gatherings), but also provided specific feedback and guidance for the PNO. For example, the Sustain Ontario 35-member advisory council held regular two-day meetings. Members explained that the meetings were an opportunity to “make personal and organizational connections”, “build the provincial networks”, and “coordinate the efforts of Sustain Ontario”.

FMM also held face-to-face meetings to coordinate the MFSN and the Sustainable and Just Working Group (SJWG), as a subgroup of the provincial network’s more established AFIs. The SJWG was established to mitigate growing territorial and ideological conflict. Members explained that making in-person connections was an important part of “building trust” and fostering “better communication, mutual support systems and collective actions”. In Nova Scotia, the ACT for CFS project invested significant resources into bringing researchers, AFIs and community organizations together on a regular basis. In the absence of regular provincial gatherings, ACT for CFS’s face-to-face meetings have become an important physical networking space for representatives from across Nova Scotia to contribute to decision making, share and reflect on research findings, and plan for future action.
A third type of initiative used to construct physical networking spaces identified throughout the four networks involved the interaction among AFIs through direct PNO programming. FMM has been the most active in this type of work through its support for small-scale food production, nutrition education and food skills projects. For example, the Northern Healthy Food Initiative brings together representatives from thirteen northern and remote communities, non-profit organizations and the public sector to share experiences and develop action plans to address food insecurity. Sustain Ontario does not run its own programs but has used AFI programming as a way to create physical networking spaces. For example, in 2011 Sustain Ontario hosted the City to Country Mobile conference, an event that explored food system challenges and opportunities in the Greater Toronto Area. The different tours included themes such as world crops, new farmers, environmental services, urban agriculture, and supply management, to name only a few. The mobile conference operated as a series of bus tours and culminated with interactive reflection over a shared meal. The event (intended to be repeated annually) constructed a physical networking space for individuals and AFIs to interact around the key issues in the province. In Nova Scotia, the participatory food costing project brings together researchers, decision makers and those most affected by food insecurity to share their stories around issues of poverty and food access (the participatory food costing project is described in Chapter 4).

Finally, another initiative to construct physical networking spaces in Nova Scotia is the FoodARC (formerly the Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security). The FoodARC is described as a participatory community-based research centre at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax. It was established to support an interdisciplinary food security research program through the collaboration between students, faculty, community members, practitioners, and policy-makers. The NSFSN has become deeply integrated into this space,
through the network’s continued work with the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects (NSPFSP) and ACT for CFS (both currently hosted at the FoodARC).

In summary, PNOs in all four case study provinces have orchestrated initiatives that contributed to the construction of physical networking spaces involving direct contact in particular places. These have primarily occurred through the coordination of provincial and regional gatherings, face-to-face meetings between AFIs leaders, and programming that bring groups into direct contact.

**Virtual networking spaces**

Virtual networking spaces are a second type of networking space constructed by the PNOs through the use of technology as a means of mediating communication. Among the networks, the Internet and new social media technologies have become widely used for regular communication. Indeed, some have argued that the networking logic of the Internet has been a key factor influencing the contemporary flexible organization and networked forms of social movements (Castells 1997; Bennett 2003; Escobar 2004; Juris 2008; Castells 2012). Among the case study networks, examples of listservs and newsletters, websites and blogs, as well as webinars and conference calls were highlighted by the PNOs as particularly valuable for maintaining contact between disparate AFIs with limited resources.

The most common initiative to construct virtual networking space in the four networks was the use of listservs and newsletters coordinated by the PNOs. With the development of more user-friendly technologies, using the Internet for sharing information has become increasingly popular among social movements (Bennett 2005). The BCFSN has a significant virtual presence through its establishment of thirteen listservs based on different thematic topics and self-defined
bioregions in British Columbia (for a description of these bioregions see Chapter 4). The listservs are hosted by the BCFSN and have established a virtual networking space for members to share information and communicate across British Columbia’s extensive geography and disparate population. Each of the listservs is open to the public and subscribers are able to post questions, messages, and responses or share information. BCFSN board members describe this as an effort to support local AFIs and regional networks with limited capacity and resources.

The use of websites and blogs was another common way that virtual networking spaces were constructed in all the provinces. The websites of the BCFSN and the NSFSN were used primarily to disseminate information, post events, and link to relevant resources. In Ontario and Manitoba the PNO’s websites were much more sophisticated and were developed as interactive platforms for communication, campaign mobilization, and information sharing. The Sustain Ontario website was the most developed of the four PNOs. It included multiple resources, a calendar of events, updates on AFI initiatives, and the opportunity for interactive discussions through a blog (see Figure 6.1). A unique element of the website was Sustain Ontario’s Growing Good Food Ideas project, which includes digital stories and virtual tours that explain how the food system works and provides concrete examples of the transformative work of AFIs in Ontario. The virtual networking spaces in Nova Scotia were much less developed than in other provinces. However,
FoodARC’s new web space (est. in 2011) added an additional means for the network to communicate. The site hosts a wealth of provincial food related resources as well as information on the NSPFSPs, ACT for CFS, and the Participatory Food Costing project.

Webinars and teleconferences have also been used frequently by the PNOs as a way to bring AFIs together. For example, Sustain Ontario coordinated a series of webinars to highlight different food system issues and showcase the work of AFIs in the province. Past topics have included beekeeping in urban Ontario, mobile abattoirs, farm to school programs and new policy initiatives. The webinars are open to the public and are a way to include people from across the province in an interactive discussion. Sustain has also been coordinating a series of conference calls on topics such as municipal food policy and children and youth. AFIs in all of the provinces pointed to these virtual networking spaces as valuable and expressed interest in increasing their use. However, while the use of virtual communication can increase participation for some AFIs, concern was also raised about communities with limited access to computer technology (e.g. remote and northern communities without internet access).

In summary, the PNOs have all constructed virtual networking spaces, but the use of these spaces and their sophistication of the tools differs in each province and appears to be directly related to the capacity of the PNO and the investment of time and resources. The use of virtual networking spaces does not seem to be as advanced as other newer social movement network initiatives that use social media as a key organizing tool to share information and organize events (e.g. Khondker 2011; Juris 2012; Castells 2012). However, virtual networking spaces were identified by AFIs as valuable and appear to be a growing opportunity.
**Scalar networking strategies**

I use the concept of “scalar strategies” here to describe the third kind of networking strategy developed by the PNOs. Like the two previous networking spaces, the strategies in this category are also established through processes of interaction and serve as a place where multiple types of interactions interweave. However, scalar networking strategies are different, as they do not necessarily involve direct contact in physical or virtual places. I describe scalar strategies where AFIs use different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects to organize around and impact provincial level policy. The provincial level is significant for organizing around food issues because under Canadian federalism, the provinces are co-sovereign jurisdictions with legislative control over a number of areas relevant to the food system including health care, agriculture, education, municipal institutions, property and civil rights. For the PNOs, a key focus has been on activities that address the existing fragmentation of food related policy divided throughout governmental departments (Rideout et al. 2007; MacRae 2011). Scalar networking strategies attempt to address the food system in a more comprehensive way through strategic efforts to scale-up the place-based work of AFIs. Thus, while these strategies may appear somewhat abstract, they have significant material consequences.

The PNOs are in a unique position to develop scalar networking strategies since they were originally established to address food system issues at the level of the province (for more background on the establishment of the PNOs see Chapter 4). For example, while a number of regional food policy councils operate in British Columbia, an AFI representative explained that the BCFSN was needed as a voice that could participate in a provincial level conversation: “If any policy push is going to come at a provincial level, it needs to come from us [the BCFSN] because there’s really nobody else.” In discussion with Sustain Ontario’s leadership, one advisory council member commented, “Our goal is to engage on the provincial policy dialogue.
That is why Sustain Ontario was formed, to provide a platform for a group of constituents who had a different vision for Ontario’s food policy and who wanted to engage in that policy making and shape the process directly.” Since its establishment, Sustain Ontario has developed a positive relationship with the provincial government. One staff member reported that government representatives regularly call the Sustain Ontario office to ask questions, float new ideas and get advice. In Nova Scotia, recognition of the need for a more engaged focus on provincial policy led to the establishment of Canada’s first official provincial food policy council. The council was given its mandate from a provincial food summit held in 2009 and had multiple members of the NSFSN and other AFIs agree to participate in its steering committee.

The development and use of policy documents is an example of an initiative used to construct scalar networking strategies by the PNOs. Typically, these documents are research-based and provide an analysis of a particular issue or area in respect to provincial (or regional) food policy. In all cases, the reports I reviewed were created through consultation with AFIs working directly on a particular set of issues. Most of the documents also included specific recommendations for government and/or civil society organizations about ways to create a healthy, ecological and just food system. For example, FMM was established as the PNO directly from the development of a policy document – the Manitoba Food Charter - an effort to engage participants from across the province in policy level discussions (for more background on the Manitoba Food Charter see Chapter 4). Food charters, described as “citizen-based vehicles to engage their public institutions and to develop a common approach for good food practices in their communities” (Koc et al. 2008: 132), are a growing phenomenon across Canada. While no government bodies officially signed the Manitoba Food Charter, it has been used as a tool to engage in an ongoing dialogue between AFIs and different governmental departments. FMM has also published numerous other policy documents to raise public awareness and as a tool to
influence government policy-making processes. For example, Manitoba’s Local Food System:
Growing Healthy Communities (published in 2009) outlined opportunities for action by the
province, as well as potential partnerships with food security stakeholders.

Sustain Ontario has published a number of policy briefs to provide information about
relevant issues and to engage AFIs in policy-based action. In 2013, Sustain Ontario released
“Policies from the Field”, series of six working papers that offered insight and analysis to key
policy issues. Written by experts from North America, Europe and Australia, the topics included
health, local procurement, and land use planning. In Nova Scotia, the NSFSN participated in the
development of the Thought About Food? workbook, DVD and background paper that served as
a primer on influencing food security from a policy relevant perspective. These resources
became the basis for a workshop series that was developed for bringing together AFIs and
training communities to understand and influence provincial level food policy.

Another common initiative used to construct scalar networking strategies was the
creation of election toolkits in British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario. In British Columbia (for
the 2007 federal election, the 2008 municipal election, and the 2009 provincial election) and
Ontario (for the 2010 municipal election and the 2011 provincial election), the toolkits provided
background information on food system issues, questions for candidates and suggested activities
during the election process. The intention was to encourage AFIs (and individuals) to voice their
experiences during election campaigns to put the food system on the government’s agenda.
FMM’s toolkit was developed as an interactive virtual hub with information about food issues
for the 2011 Manitoba provincial election. The interactive website provided a wealth of
information about issues and political platforms and attempted to engage individuals to connect
with local AFIs and candidates on food system issues.
The PNOs have also been directly involved in policy related actions that aim to scale-up issues being addressed by place-based AFIs. An example is the BCFSN’s work to change the provincial meat inspection policies. The effort evolved from AFIs across the province that were concerned the existing regulations would eliminate small abattoirs because they could not afford the costs of upgrading to the new guidelines. After significant efforts by the BCFSN (and others), in 2010 the British Columbia’s Ministry of Health announced a graduated licensing approach for meat production and processing. Further, in 2012, a representative of the BCFSN gave a deputation to the House of Commons Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to recommend integrating the regulations into broader food system policy (e.g. a greater focus on society-wide health and well-being, supporting sub-national food production, processing and retailing) (Gibson 2012). Sustain Ontario has also been involved in a number of policy-related actions including the development of the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy. This multi-organizational partnership aimed to develop a coordinated, cross-ministerial approach to food policy and programming in the province. The research, discussion and negotiation that have surrounded this project have brought together a range of AFIs as well as organizations interested more broadly in policy-related health and equity issues.

Beyond these provincial policy related actions, PNOs in all four provinces were involved in hosting “kitchen table” talks during the development phase of the People’s Food Policy (PFP) (the PFP is discussed in Chapter 4). Meetings were held in different locations throughout the provinces to reflect on the challenges in the dominant food system and to propose solutions. Through collaborative discussions, AFI used their experience in local communities to propose and prioritize the basis of a national food policy platform. These examples of the PNOs’ involvement in provincial level policy highlight the way that scales of action are not fixed, but constructed through strategic action. Furthermore, they show the way that scalar networking
strategies have been used at different levels of government, from the municipal to the federal level (as demonstrated by mobilization around the PFP).

In this section I have shown how the PNOs develop scalar networking strategies that use advocacy at different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects and create more supportive policy environments. These examples of bringing AFIs together to develop policy documents, election toolkits, and policy related actions demonstrate how the place-based work of AFIs can be scaled-up into broader political arenas. While these activities are not without their challenges they open new possibilities for impacting the food system (*Chapter 7* addresses these challenges and possibilities in more detail).

**Areas of Contention**

The research presented in this chapter has demonstrated ways that the PNOs work to foster and support network mobilization. Exploring the administrative structures of the PNOs, their role as weavers in the provincial networks and the development of networking strategies, I have demonstrated that the PNOs play an important strategic role in forging connections and sustaining the provincial food networks. While there are many beneficial outcomes to collaboration through networking strategies, the coming together of diverse AFI also creates a distinct set of social dynamics (Nicholls 2009). While these dynamics can result in tensions that impede the networking strategies, engaging and negotiating the differences between AFIs may also enhance the provincial food networks (as suggested by the warrior-builder-weaver framework advanced by Stevenson et al. 2008). In this section I address some of the tensions that were found. I describe these tensions as areas of contention in two general categories: 1) uneven access to the networking spaces can result in power disparities between AFIs; and, 2) attempts to
develop commonalities amongst diverse AFIs can lead to ideological conflict. I suggest that as network weavers, addressing these tensions must be a preemptive focus of the PNO’s efforts in order to sustain the network’s activity.

The most prominent tension observed was around uneven access to the networks. The AFIs involved in the networks (and in this research) ranged in size and capacity (e.g., some are volunteer run while others have large budgets and staff). As a result, AFIs come to the networks with different material resources as well as different levels of social, economic and cultural capital. A number of AFIs I spoke with expressed that they had limited resources to participate in physical networking spaces due to lack of funds for traveling long distances and limited time to be away from home or work. The high costs of travel for AFIs in northern and remote communities, for example, severely limited participation. Participation in virtual networking spaces was often impeded by limited access to technology (i.e. computers, smartphones, and Internet). Further, some AFIs expressed that they had inadequate time to use technology to participate.

While PNOs made some supports available to increase more marginal AFI’s participation in the networking strategies, they were rarely able to cover the full costs (i.e. child care, accommodation, lost work time, etc.). Besides direct financial support, the PNOs have attempted to address uneven access to participation in other ways. For example, the BCFSN’s choice to move the location of the annual gatherings enabled different groups of people to participate, but also reduced the continuity of participation. In Manitoba, the provincial Growing Local conference has always been held in Winnipeg, which is where most of the attendees live and work. FMM has attempted to include participants from rural and northern communities, but their participation is dependent on external funding and remains limited. Even when participants are
supported to attend, there have been additional barriers that have limited their ability to engage in dialogue (e.g., language, ways of interaction). Some Sustain Ontario members have made repeated requests for the gatherings to be held in Thunder Bay, to make them more accessible to northern participants. However, due to concerns about overall registration numbers, all of the gatherings to date have been held in Southern Ontario.

Despite commendable efforts by the PNOs to accommodate AFIs with fewer resources, ability to participate in the networks has not been equitable. Following from this, tensions have arisen around power disparities between AFIs. For example, differences in capacity often led to AFIs with more capacity dominating and having more influence on decision-making. At gatherings, I observed that more resourced and influential AFIs tended to take on more leadership roles and contributed more to discussions and workshops. Some smaller AFI representatives expressed concern that larger, more established AFIs dominate the physical networking spaces. The uneven nature of access has led some AFIs to withdraw participation completely, noting that they experienced little benefit from their involvement. While the networking strategies may enhance the collective power of the network, involvement can also exasperate internal tensions based on class, culture and geography. If PNOs fail to mitigate these realities, the networking strategy risks reproducing and even exacerbating social inequalities.

A second set of tensions was conflicts that arose during attempts find commonalities amongst the diversity. Using the different networking strategies, PNOs created opportunities for AFIs to come together with diverse interests and without ideological coherence as a necessary precondition. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the networks are constituted by autonomous AFIs with different goals, objectives, and approaches (as well as with different levels of power, as discussed above). These differences can become intensified as AFIs come together in new spaces
outside of the places in which they have emerged. For example, decisions must be made around a gathering’s major themes, issues in which the PNOs should focus their energy, and topics for policy campaigns. All of these choices are based on attempts to find commonalities among the AFIs in order to move forward collaboratively. However, attempts to build consensus may overlook diversity. In other words, through attempts to speak with a common voice or establish common interests, AFIs may feel that their specific approaches, goals, ideologies, and strategies are being compromised.

Many of the PNOs were well aware of this tension and attempted to develop processes of interaction that did not hinder the development of networking strategies. For example, when Sustain Ontario was first established, a decision was made to avoid difficult issues that historically, had impeded network cohesion. While this may have been a pragmatic choice at the time, the tensions did not disappear. At various moments during provincial gatherings, webinars and conference calls, I witnessed intensive disagreements about particular issues (e.g., the low wages and poor working conditions of farmers and farmworkers being positioned in contrast to urban poverty and food insecurity). Sustain Ontario’s constellation model, and the similar models developed by other PNOs, thrive in part by evading ideological conflicts. This may be of particular concern in virtual networking spaces, where participation tends to be more passive than in physical spaces. For example, watching a webinar or reading a blog provides opportunities to comment and ask questions, but it also circumvents face-to-face communication. For some this may provide new ways to participate, but it has also been shown to cause disengagement (Hacker 1996). Due to a different set of social cues with technology-mediated communication, there is an increased potential for misunderstanding, which have led to further difficulties in addressing tensions. According to the literature, technology mediated
communication in virtual network spaces may actually reinforce inequality more than overcome it (Calhoun 1998; Myers 1994).

In summary, these two general tensions present challenges to network building, but they also point to ways that networks can be made more accessible, equitable and inclusive. While the PNOs have developed these networking strategies, an assemblages lens reminds us that they do not fully control them. However, as network weavers the PNOs have taken on a high level of responsibility to support, and at times govern them. Negotiating the different needs of the participating AFIs and ensuring that the networking strategies undertaken are effective and inclusive remains the fundamental task. The work of creating broad-based networks is predicated on confronting contentious issues as they arise. Contrary to the idea that these kinds of issues should be put aside to avoid dividing people, I have suggested that fostering and sustaining the networks requires a commitment to engaging in difficult discussions.

Conclusion

Bringing together autonomous organizations, forging connections and sustaining the networks require a significant amount of work and resources. While the networks are decentralized (with no organization holding substantial control), the PNOs all hold more-centralized positions, providing an important opportunity for building and strengthening collaboration. In this chapter, I have examined the way that the four case study PNOs act as weavers within the provincial food networks, actively drawing diverse and disparate AFIs together and working to foster and support network mobilization. While the networking strategies have greatly increased the levels of collaboration within the networks and contributed to multiple successes, bringing together AFIs with diverse approaches and perspectives from different places also creates tensions. As weavers within the networks, PNOs must navigate
ideological conflicts, as well as material and discursive power relations that emerge from the interactions. Addressing these tensions is an important way to build trust and should not be avoided to appease short-term objectives. Further, the PNO’s understanding and navigating these tensions needs to be addressed preemptively in a way that considers the decentralized network structure while recognizing the valued autonomy of the participating AFIs. While tensions can impede the networking strategies, engaging and negotiating the differences between AFIs may also enhance the provincial food networks.

In the next Chapter, I shift from a focus on the PNOs to examine the kinds of work taking place within the networks more broadly. Since the explicit mandate of the PNOs (and most of the AFIs) is to work towards a healthy, ecological and just food system, it is essential to assess whether - and in what ways - this is happening. Expanding on the framework for a transformative food politics outlined in Chapter 2, I investigate the kinds of collaborative activities taking place within the provincial food networks, their strengths and limitations, and how they may be contributing to broader food system transformation. I demonstrate that the networks are providing an opportunity for AFIs to mobilize and develop transformative orientations, but that these efforts also have some significant limitations that must be addressed.
Chapter 7
Prospects for a Transformative Food Politics

We are aiming for a fundamental transformation in the relationships between human beings and the planet . . . We are looking to fundamentally transform how those relationships are organized. But there is a huge continuum from where we are to the various ideals that any of us could imagine. Each step that takes people closer to each of the solutions that we would desire is a step in the right direction . . . We will continue to keep that idea of fundamental transformation as part of our vision as we take small steps along the way.
~ Sustain Ontario staff

My research uses the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool to consider the interrelationships and concrete practices among diverse alternative food initiatives (AFI) within provincial food networks. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that the networks were extremely decentralized and made up of autonomous actors with diverse objectives, approaches, and tactics that exhibit some elements of a collective identity but do not align into a coherent political program. Within the networks, there is no one organization that can claim leadership or fully control them. However, the provincial network organizations (PNO) all emerged as more-central actors. In Chapter 6, I explored the positioning of the PNOs as weavers within the networks and the way that they have attempted to forge connections between AFIs and sustain collaboration. Specifically, I examined the structures and roles of the PNOs and their efforts to develop networking strategies for AFIs to come together to share their experiences and knowledge, learn from each other and act collectively. In this final chapter I investigate how the provincial networks have been used to facilitate a transformative food politics by highlighting examples of AFIs that are actively collaborating with others to further their objectives and goals.

Since the explicit mandate of the PNOs (and most of the AFIs) is to work towards a healthy, ecological and just food system, it is essential to assess whether - and in what ways - this
is happening. In order to critically analyze the kinds of collaborative work happening within the networks, I begin by drawing on critical scholarship to identify proposed processes and strategies for changing the dominant food system. I return to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 to elaborate on the concept of a transformative food politics, a description of attempts to address the root causes of current challenges, rather than just the symptoms. Building on the this literature, I expand on the framework proposed in Chapter 2 to elucidate the three interrelated elements: 1) the transition from individualized market mechanisms to collective subjectivities; 2) an approach that considers the multifaceted, interrelated web of elements, activities and relationships that constitute the food system; and, 3) a politics of reflexive localization that involves both place-based organizing and connections to broader solidarities across localities. Following an overview of the framework, I apply these three elements of a transformative food politics to the four provincial food networks. Pointing to a range of examples, I draw connections between the literature and the case studies to highlight where transformative work is already happening and to identify the opportunities and areas for improvement. Based on an analysis of the research findings, I demonstrate that the networks offer an opportunity for AFIs to mobilize and develop transformative orientations, but that these efforts have some significant limitations that must be addressed.

**Three Elements of a Transformative Food Politics**

In Chapter 2, I summarized recent studies that have questioned the approaches and practices of AFIs purporting to be developing an alternative to the corporate led industrial food system. Some recent critiques of AFIs have pointed to actors engaging in uncritical practices,

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33 Parts of this section have been adapted from Levkoe 2011a.
wherein social relations are assumed to be inevitable and ahistorical and consequently enable the reproduction of inequitable and unjust social relations. Further, some critics have suggested that the work of AFIs has been counterproductive in that it has ignored the interconnected nature of problems and is complicit in the neoliberalization of the food system. In Chapter 2, I also introduced the concept of a transformative food politics to describe a suite of strategies and activities that attempt to move beyond making slight changes to the current food system towards a reconceptualization of both the root of current dilemmas and of the solutions that will address them. Instead of simply lamenting the effects of existing systems, or pointing to an end goal of the kind of system we desire, a transformative food politics would engage in a continual dialectic between what is and what ought to be with a focus on the processes of transformation. It is a kind of “real utopian” experiment (Wright 2010) that helps to think about, and act on the possibilities for transformation while being aware of unintended consequences of our actions and the normative trade offs. To elucidate a framework for understanding these transformative processes, I built on the critiques of AFIs to describe three interrelated elements: collective subjectivity, a comprehensive food system approach, and a politics of reflexive localization.

**Collective subjectivity** is the first element in my conception of a transformative food politics. Härting (2005) describes subjectivity as “the cultural, social, political, and psychological processes that shape and determine who we think we are and how we situate ourselves in the world.” Accordingly, collective subjectivity refers to the shift from individualized market mechanisms as the mode for change to collaborative mobilization around collective needs. This element is a response to voices in the literature that suggest some AFIs have been complicit in propagating neoliberal ideals and facilitating the retrenchment of the state (see Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of this literature; and, for example Guthman 2008b; Sharzer 2012). For example, some have suggested that while community food enterprises may provide “healthy”,

“ethical” or “green” food options for some people they maintain and reproduce social inequality by encouraging individual responsibility and consumer choice for the socially and economically privileged (Guthman 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2009; Lockie 2009).

Collective subjectivity is rooted in the idea of “reclaiming the commons” articulated in social movement discourse as “reorienting economies away from an exclusive focus on commodification and profit maximization, and towards a more equitable and sustainable provisioning of [collective] human [and non-human] needs” (Johnston 2008: 243). For example, as part of the commons people would collectively control and be guaranteed access to “life goods” such as food, clean air, and portable water (Wuyts 1992; McMurtry 1999; Wittman et al. 2010). Analyzing contemporary socio-spatial organizing, Haarstad (2007) describes the theory and practice of collective political subjectivity as “constructing a project around the interests of a broad range of actors who can negotiate the fundamental power relations in contemporary capitalism” (57). Unlike capitalist tendencies of homogenization, which attempt to subsume all relationships into the market, collective subjectivity points to broader and more diverse kinds of relationships. In respect to food organizing, this involves moving beyond individual, market-based solutions (e.g. acting strictly as a consumer or producer) towards ones that embed food within meaningful cultural and community relations while improving production of, and access to, good, healthy food for all.

Articulating a “politics of the subject,” Gibson-Graham (2006) describe the way that ethical practices, which bring principles into action, offer the potential for these types of collective subject positions to be developed. Their work observes and documents the ways that people have the ability to (re)imagine and enact a different kind of reality through the cultivation of the self as a critically thinking subject. According to Gibson-Graham, this cultivation of the
self offers the potential to enable participation in creative and innovative forms of collective action through (re)creating individuals as communal subjects. Likewise, for Patricia Allman and John Wallis (1990),

…we must recognize that the present is the social product of human beings but a product which they have created, and which we continue to recreate, in the absence of critical choice. Ironically, this is where the hope lies. If our given conditions are not natural or inevitable but the products of human action, then human beings can collectively change them (17).

Thus, I suggest that a transformative food politics would identify and act upon problems at the core of the food system by refocusing analysis from the individual towards the collective as the primary agent of change. And, since collectives represent a multiplicity of differences (in their constitution and character) there would not be only one approach to solutions or even a single target. While a continuous and long-term process, these activities can begin at any time and in any place where people agree to democratically engage in personal and social transformation (Gibson-Graham 2006; Cameron and Gordon 2010; Wright 2010; Wilson 2012). A central aspect of collective subjectivity is that food can act as a tool for building complex memberships in a society with both rights and responsibilities (Welsh and MacRae 1989; Baker 2004; Wilkins 2005; Levkoe 2006). From this perspective, individuals are conceived as having capacities beyond consuming or producing goods and services and society is more than a marketplace.

A comprehensive food system is the second element of a transformative food politics. A comprehensive food system approach can be described as a perspective that integrates social justice, ecological sustainability, community development and democracy throughout all aspects of the food system - from production to processing to distribution to consumption to waste management. This perspective recognizes the interrelated benefits of a healthy, ecological and just food system for the environment, agriculture, health, social services, etc. This element is a
response to the concern that some AFIIs have been complicit in the theoretical and practical isolation of issues and the separation of sectors within the food system (see Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of this literature; and, for example Goodman and DuPuis 2002). These critics argue that failing to make connections between the interrelated aspects within the food system can create new challenges that divert efforts away from addressing the systemic problems at the core of the corporate led industrial food system (see for example Allen 1999; Tarasuk 2001). Discussing the necessity of a comprehensive approach, Power (1999) warns,

[bringing together different approaches] involves multiple contradictions and conflicting interests that will remain unresolved unless we acknowledge and elucidate them and then think clearly and carefully about how to overcome them. Democracy cannot thrive without social justice. The planet cannot thrive without sustainability. The future looks bleak unless we find ways to achieve both (35).

Over time, critical food theorists and practitioners have increasingly come to recognize that in order to understand any one aspect of the food system a comprehensive approach is necessary. Earlier political economy perspectives of food and agriculture tended to ignore producer-consumer relations, locating power primarily in the sphere of production. On the other hand, classical economic approaches tended to put power entirely in the sphere of consumer choice (Goodman and DuPuis 2002). By the late 1980s, there was a call for more integrated approaches based on the recognition that a more comprehensive food system perspective offered new analytic tools to understand the broad range of factors that contributed to the food and agriculture sectors (Bowler and Ilberly 1987; Atkins 1988; Marsden et al. 1996; Winter 2003). More recently, theorists have argued that political economy approaches must incorporate the new ecological and cultural conditions of the global food system into the analysis (Goodman and Watts 1997; Winter 2003; Morgan et al. 2006; Weis 2007). Goodman (1999) asserts that while capitalist enterprises progressively squeeze biological constraints out of the production process, recent trends give nature and culture newfound significance. This perspective is based on a belief
in the retention of key qualities embedded in food through specific production, processing and consumption processes.

Addressing AFIs directly, Goodman and DuPuis (2002) emphasize the need to adopt a more integrated framework that would pay analytical attention to diverse forms of social subjectivity, build formal alliances between producers and consumers, and take both social and ecological systems into account. They write, “these alliances include consumers as both actual and potential actors, and the social relations formed on consumption - both with producers and with other consumers - are regarded as more than just ‘private,’ that is a-political, action” (17). Unlike some production-oriented perspectives where the commodity is seen primarily as a veil that conceals exploitative social relations (Cook and Crang 1996), Goodman and DuPuis assert that food is an area of contestation that can also reveal and challenge concentrations of political power (see also Hudson and Hudson 2003).

From a comprehensive perspective, food can serve as an entry point to analyze and contest broader social, political and economic relations across the entire food web. Building viable solutions also demands establishing alliances with actors that may only be peripherally related to food and agriculture. Allen (2004) writes,

Interactions among the larger environmental, social and economic systems in which agriculture is situated directly influence agricultural production and distribution. This means that solutions need to be found both on and beyond the farm, and that solutions will be not only technical but also social and political as well (16).

Thus, a comprehensive food system approach would provide AFIs with a more integrated understanding of the multiple issues and sectors that constitute the food system. Further, it contributes to a transformative food politics by engaging in a critical reflection of existing practices along with the broader sociopolitical context.
Reflexive localization is the third element of a transformative food politics. I describe this element as transcending a static interpretation of the meaning of local while preserving and maintaining unique characteristics and diversities developed in place. In other words, a transformative food politics begins with AFIs working on targeted projects in place but would move beyond day-to-day activities to create a wider politicized culture of action. According to David Harvey (1996), this process would require a “continuous dialectic between the militant particularism of lived lives and a struggle to achieve sufficient critical distance and detachment to formulate global ambitions” (44). This element responds to the concern that some AFIs fetishize ideas of “local,” by assuming that foods produced in short geographic proximity have an innate association with positive attributes (see Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of this literature; and, for example Allen et al. 2003b; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Winter 2003). For a transformative food politics, reflexive localization would entail AFIs moving beyond ideas of the local scale as exhibiting desirable qualities in and of itself (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). It would also mean recognizing that ideas like social justice and ecological sustainability have different meanings depending on the particular contexts in which they originate and thus cannot be carried forward unexamined (Allen et al. 2003b).

Analysts have pointed to the need for AFIs to adopt a reflexive perspective of “local” that recognizes and encourages difference both within and beyond local spaces (Hinrichs 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Born and Purcell 2006). In contrast to ideas of fixed scales, critical geographers have argued that scale is a spatial relation that is socially constructed through struggle (Marston 2000; Brenner 2001). From this perspective, the local and global are understood as mutually constitutive levels of social organization – local is not seen as an alternative to globalization, but as an intrinsic part of it. For example, studies have described the way scale can be used strategically such as “jumping scales”, where groups pursue an agenda at
different scales in order to shift the balance of power (Smith 1992; Swyngedouw 1997), and “boomerang strategies” where organizations bypass the state and find international allies to raise pressure (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Thus, while accepting place as central to the work of AFIs, the contextual meaning of local needs to be critically examined to “understand how social and environmental relations are themselves spatialized” (Hinrichs 2003: 43). Amin (2002) describes this particular focus on local as a shift from a politics of place through which local is valorized and defended, to a politics in place through which locales are seen as inter-connected sites where the multi-scalar politics of globalization are embedded and contested.

By problematizing ideas of local, AFIs can begin to break down barriers as opposed to build them up. DuPuis and Goodman (2005) write, “we have to move away from the idea that food systems become just by virtue of making them local and toward a conversation about how to make local food systems more just” (364). Thus, a transformative food politics involves making localism an open, ongoing and process-based vision as opposed to a fixed set of standards or an end in and of itself – that is, it involves a process of ongoing reflexive localization. For AFIs, reflexive localization underscores the idea that while localizing the food system has many potential benefits, locally produced or distributed food are not inherently good. Instead, ideas of local must be contextualized by the historical and social elements of a particular place.

These three elements of a transformative food politics are not meant to provide a definitive solution or step-by-step evaluative tool. Instead, my intention here is to establish a framework for examining the transformative potential of collaborative initiatives being mobilized within the provincial food networks. Following a brief discussion of the methods employed in this chapter, I use the three elements to investigate how provincial networks can be
used to facilitate a transformative food politics by highlighting examples of AFIs that are actively collaborating with others to further their objectives and goals.

Methods

In this chapter I draw on the provincial network survey, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, site visits, background information, and the popular education workshops. Background data was also used in this chapter collected directly from the AFIs, from organizational websites and from selected internal and external documents. Further, the analysis draws on my experience participating in the regional gatherings and visiting specific projects in each of the provinces (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of the method used).

Alternative Food Initiatives and the Strategic Use of Food Networks

In the section above, I elaborated on the framework of a transformative food politics as the strategies and activities that attempt to move beyond making slight changes to the current food system towards a reconceptualization of both the root of current dilemmas and of the solutions that will address them. In this section I apply the three elements of a transformative food politics - collective subjectivity, a comprehensive food system approach, and reflexive localization - to investigate the kinds of collaborative initiatives being mobilized within the case study networks. I address each of the elements in turn by presenting the strengths and limitations for AFIs that are actively using the provincial network to further their objectives and goals.
Collective subjectivity

Collective subjectivity describes a shift from the individual towards the collective as the primary agent of change. In this research, I assessed the way food was being used within the networks to engage in collective action among a wide diversity of AFIs. Describing the value of collaboration, an AFI representative in Manitoba suggested: “[the act of participating in the network] foregrounds the politics of food in an interesting way. It takes the issue beyond the individual and makes food appear to be a political subject worthy of advocating to governments.” In a conversation at the of the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN) gathering, a member commented: “you may think you are food secure, but if your neighbour isn’t, then you don’t have food security in your neighbourhood. We are getting away from that ‘me’ stuff back to an ‘us’ stuff.” Overhearing the conversation, another member chimed in, “It isn’t just about feeding people; it’s about working with our communities to feed each other.”

While these comments express a general sentiment towards collective subjectivities, the examples of collaborative AFI activities in this section demonstrate how these ideals are being implemented in the four case study provinces.

Representatives I spoke with described how the provincial networks were used to develop collaborative activities ranging from community festivals celebrating cultural cuisines and local harvests to resisting corporate led industrial practices (e.g. free trade agreements, genetically modified organisms, factory farming, inadequate labour laws) and pushing forward particular policy issues (e.g. through food policy councils/roundtables and food charters). In many of these conversations, AFI representatives spoke about food as a way to engage a broad range of people and to address an even broader range of issues. To highlight how the networks are strategically used to facilitate collective subjectivity, I have organized examples into three categories:
engaging cooperative governance, promoting public engagement, and establishing collaborations that politicize individuals and empower them to act collectively.

The first category, cooperative governance, refers to projects that involve groups of people and AFIs that share ownership, management and decision-making. For example, FarmFolk CityFolk (FFCF) in British Columbia has established a network of community farms where land is held in trust for collectives of people rather than being privately owned. These farms produce food for local eaters in perpetuity using sustainable agricultural practices. FFCF brings together individuals, non-profit organizations and small businesses using the provincial network and positions their work as building the foundations for a more democratic and equitable food system. Established in 1993, FFCF works to cultivate a local, sustainable food system by providing access to, and protection of agricultural land, supporting growers and producers, and engaging communities in the celebration of food. FFCF currently works with twenty community farms across British Columbia to conserve farmland, and build a healthy, just and local food system.

Another example of cooperative governance is the range of cooperatively owned and operated non-profits and small businesses with an explicit mandate to contribute to a healthy, ecological and just food system. These types of initiatives offer a democratic and collective governance structure that challenges the corporate industrial model. In general, a cooperative is an organization controlled by members that use its services. They encourage collectives of individuals to pool their resources and share both the benefits and the risks to achieve common goals. A recent study by the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA 2009) found that there are about 200 cooperatives of various sizes involved in the production, marketing, retail, processing and distribution of food in Canada. Involvement in these food co-operatives varies from single membership (e.g. farmers) to multi-stakeholder models (e.g. farmers, eaters, workers,
community organizations). Examples of cooperatives from this research include Eat Local Sudbury Cooperative in Ontario (with producers and eaters as members), the Manitoba Farmers Market Association (with markets and producers as members) and the Harvest Moon Society (with farmers and eaters and managers). In the popular education workshops, cooperatives were identified as a valuable way to bring individuals and AFIs together to experiment with a more desirable food system governance model. Some specific examples discussed in the workshops were: the Kootenay Co-op in Nelson, British Columbia founded on values of democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; the Neechi Foods Co-op in Winnipeg, Manitoba, an Aboriginal grocery and specialty store that is owned and operated by workers; the West End Food Coop in Toronto, Ontario that includes farmers, eaters, workers, and community partners with a mission to become a neighbourhood food hub that aims to have a positive impact on the economy, environment and society; Off The Hook in Nova Scotia, a Community Supported Fishery made up of small-scale, ground fish, bottom hook, and line fishermen from the Bay of Fundy; as well as a number of traditional community shared agriculture (CSA) projects that encourage urban and rural residents to share responsibility for the way their food is grown and how it is produced.

A second category of examples of collective subjectivity is public engagement. This involves the growing number of food policy councils and roundtables that have emerged over the past two decades. As another model of public engagement in food issues, food policy councils and roundtables demonstrate the way that networks can be used to bring AFIs and other stakeholders (sometimes unlikely allies) into deliberative dialogue. Through this work, food policy councils and roundtables engage citizens and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, rather than as representatives of special interest groups (Roberts 2010). Building on the success and support of the Toronto Food Policy Council (Blay-Palmer 2009), food policy councils and
roundtables have been established across Canada to empower their members and the broader public, support AFIs through the development of new problem-solving skills, and transform the everyday functioning of governments (Schiff 2008). A 2012 census revealed that there were 59 food policy councils and roundtables known to be in existence throughout Canada (Winne 2013). Many of the AFIs I interviewed, noted that they were connected to a food policy council or roundtable in some way. For example, the Vancouver Food Policy Council is an active member of the BCFSN, the Winnipeg Food Security Council is incubated by Food Matters Manitoba (FMM), Just Food (formerly the Ottawa Food Security Council) and the Toronto Food Policy Council were founding members of Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming (Sustain Ontario), and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (NSFSN) coordinating committee members sit on the steering committee of the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council.

An example from my research was the Waterloo Regional Food Systems Roundtable (WRFSRT) in Ontario. The group was established in 2007 with the mission “to champion a vibrant and healthy local food system” through increasing awareness and communicating with a common voice to promote action. Similar to the work of other weaver organizations (Stevenson et al. 2008), the WRFSRT brings together diverse AFIs from the public, private and non-profit sectors to develop collaborative solutions to challenges in the food system. Describing this approach, one of the members of the WRFSRT explained. “Not only do we need public awareness, but we also need to address the inequalities that are behind our system . . . Making people angry and awareness is important, but unless you change the policies and laws you can’t do anything.” Like most food policy councils and roundtables, the WRFSRT is not bound by the interests of a particular sector and its politics emerges from an ability to tackle food system problems collaboratively and democratically.
The third set of examples of collective subjectivity is categorized as collaborations that have politicized and empowered individuals to act collectively. One example is participatory food costing in Nova Scotia. This project builds on the National Nutritious Food Basket\textsuperscript{34} to monitor the cost and affordability of eating a healthy diet. As opposed to working strictly with professional researchers, participatory food costing trains participants around issues of food insecurity, provincial level policy and research skills. Members of the NSFSN explained that participatory food costing has succeeded in connecting individual experiences of food insecurity to a broader political agenda around issues of poverty, agriculture and ecological sustainability. Further, the data emerging from the food costing studies has become the basis for provincial efforts towards advocacy, policy change, and movement building. In this way, food costing represents a series of politicizing moments that have contributed to the development of a broader network of food related activists in Nova Scotia (\textit{Chapter 4} provides more detail of food costing in relation to the establishment of the Nova Scotia food network).

Another example of politicization and empowerment is the Northern Healthy Food Initiative (NHFI) in Manitoba. The project involves a diverse group of partners that have come together to establish the foundations of a food system that meets the needs of Indigenous communities in the north. Managed by the provincial government in partnership with a group of civil-society organizations, and supported by a full-time staff person from FMM, the NHFI works with thirteen northern and remote communities on food security issues. In Fox Lake, for example, there are very few skilled hunters left in the community, which has resulted in limited

\textsuperscript{34} Introduced in 1974, the NNFB collects data on about sixty foods from grocery stores and determines the overall cost for different age and gender groups. The results are used to promote and support the development of policies to increase access to nutritious food. While the data is collected across the country, municipal and regional governments develop their own protocols to guide the collection of food costs in their jurisdiction.
access to traditional meats. As a part of the NHFI program, elders were brought into local schools to reintroduce knowledge about traditional foods and hunting and gathering practices. The project also involved mentorship programs for youth, supporting community gardens, raising chickens and re-introducing preservation techniques for sharing traditional foods. Since FMM’s involvement, the Fox Lake’s goose and moose hunt has been substantially revitalized, with meats being distributed to the community. A FMM staff person explained to me that the NHFI uses food to bring individuals together around a range of broader issues facing the communities which has resulted in collective action and a broader political engagement:

In these communities, many people are focused on the immediate. But I see big things, like people mobilizing around core issues such as social services, and control of their land. The NHFI is a place where people connect. People know the current system doesn't work, and they're trying to make things better, using food, together.

Indeed, critics may dismiss these examples as simply reproducing a neoliberal logic (i.e. a retreat of the state from social welfare provisioning, a downloading of responsibility, etc.). However, this kind of a limited view overlooks the way that these, along with many other initiatives throughout the provincial food networks, reinforce the idea that food can be an entry point into understanding and addressing a broader range of issues in a much more politicized way.

Despite these positive examples of AFIs actively collaborating through the provincial networks, my research also found some collaborative initiatives that were not reflective of collective subjectivity. Discussions with AFIs and a review of the collaborative activities revealed that many initiatives were still focused on educating the public with a goal of influencing personal behaviour. At one level, this approach reproduces neoliberal ideals putting responsibility for self-improvement on individuals. For example, comments like this one from an AFI representative in Ontario were common: “Education translates into people buying more
local food and being influenced to do something . . . but education must also translate into policy.” Notably, this comment also highlights the way that education and awareness can be used as a point of entry into broader political action. For example, a staff member from FMM outlined their strategy of “getting people to switch $10 a week” to buying local and sustainable food as part of “educating and engaging action around food justice”. In a similar initiative, the WRFSRT explained their integrated priorities for action that include improving skills for growing and preparing food but also education about the food system, as part of a broader process to reclaim democratic control of all aspect of the food system. During the interviews, I heard many similar ideas expressed by AFIs about collaborative activities taking place within the networks. In summary, focusing strictly on education with an aim to influence personal behaviour may not result in significant structural change. However, AFIs actively collaborating with others through network connections have used education as part of a broader strategy towards engaging individuals towards transformative orientations.

Another limitation to collective subjectivity that arose from the research findings was that some AFIs involved in building strategic partnerships were often reluctant to engage in an explicit critique of the corporate led industrial food system. Through discussions in the four case study provinces, it became clear that there was an awareness of the imbalance of power in the food system (i.e. skewed towards corporate and state actors). However, there was also a hesitancy to explicitly name it for fear of damaging established relationships with governments and corporate partners. An example of this was the reaction one organization had to a specific phrase I used in the public report published from this research. In the description of the project, the report stated: “ . . . the research explores the role that food networks, rather than individual initiatives, play in developing resistance to the corporate led industrial food system.” Upon receiving the final copy of the report, the organization asked for the line to be removed due to a
concern about how it might affect their relationship with the provincial government. The emailed request made reference to another researcher that had used “controversial” language in a report, which ended up causing tensions with a particular Minister’s office. In this example, the disagreement was not about what was being said, but about the language that was used to say it and the affect it could have on an existing partnership.

The above discussion about collective subjectivity highlights some of the opportunities and limitations of collaborative activities for food system transformation. In the examples of cooperative governance, public engagement and collaborations that politicize and empower individuals to act collectively, there is evidence that the networks are being used strategically to facilitate collaborative activities that challenge the dominant food system. However, the research also found that a number of activities were focused on education as a means to encourage personal responsibility, and that some networked AFIs felt constraints around being able to explicitly critique the corporate led industrial food system.

**A comprehensive food system approach**

As part of a transformative food politics, a food system refers to the interactive, interdependent web of elements, activities and relationships that bring food to our plate. Unlike approaches that address food issues in isolation, a comprehensive perspective involves embedding food throughout all levels and sectors of society. Networks offer strategic opportunities to address food from a more comprehensive perspective because they are predicated on the involvement of a wide diversity of actors from different sectors, each with different objectives and approaches (see *Chapter 5*). In my discussions with representatives from the BCFSN, the conversation focused on the way that different food-related issues had typically
been the responsibility of separate funding bodies or governmental departments with contradictory missions. For example, one of the BCFSN board members noted that Ministries of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade are mandated to support the profit making agendas of the big food companies while Health, Environment and Social Services are left to “mop up the damage.” Using a more comprehensive approach, the board member explained, “The BCFSN addresses food systematically so that different parts of our movement can take on different components. The network is about linking, which makes it an unwieldy blob at times. But that’s also its strength.” Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker from Sustain Ontario reflected on the advantages of a diverse and decentralized network structure. She suggested that centralized network structures are more conducive to groups that focus on one particular issue, while a decentralized structure presents distinct advantages and challenges for developing a comprehensive food system approach:

A huge advantage is that we are required to be in constant dialogue about the whole food system and each of the players begins to change through that dialogue. We progressively understand more about how the food system works and developing more holistic approaches to change it . . .. It takes a lot of time to have these conversations and it requires patience with process. But I think the advantages far outweigh the challenges. In my experience, the players see that and find value in understanding a system rather than just bringing their piece to the table.

Premised on the belief that the current food system does not work for everyone, Sustain Ontario (like the other PNOs) has worked to broaden the conversation in order to create a stronger coalition. According to one of the staff members, this is accomplished through “bringing in groups we are not completely comfortable with to have those hard conversations. If we want to affect policy and move the yardstick, we need more than the ‘usual suspects’.”

In a similar vein, a member of the NSFSN noted that the provincial network offers the opportunity to address food system issues in an interconnected way with the purpose of targeting the root causes of hunger and food insecurity:
We can’t look at these issues in isolation. It is not about just feeding people but it is about making sure our economy is capable of repairing the damage that is being done on an ongoing basis that, in some cases, put people in that situation.

Within the four case study networks, there were many examples where bridges are being built between different issues to understand and transform the food system in a more comprehensive way. Through collaborative efforts, a number of activities within the networks are demonstrating that addressing food system issues as interconnected and relational has immense transformative potential. To illustrate these efforts, I point to some key examples of a comprehensive food system approach being addressed in the four case study provinces. I have organized these examples into two main categories: developing community food hubs and creating common projects among unlikely allies.

The first set of examples of a comprehensive food system approach can be categorized as community food hubs. Typically, the concept of a “food hub” has been used to describe the infrastructure that supports connections between producers of locally grown food and nearby consumers (Levkoe and Wakefield 2011). In this research, I use the term “community food hub” more broadly, to describe the way that networked AFIs have developed social and physical infrastructure that integrates different kinds of food-related initiatives in order to create synergies. Speaking to the value of community food hubs for food system work, a board member of the BCFSN commented,

there are links being made between the food bank, the garden, and the community centre so they can do much more together, having a multiplier effect on the impact. Because then, it’s not just the food bank, or just the community garden or the community centre . . . because then they can build synergies and they can build on each other’s expertise.

Examples of community food hubs within the provincial food networks highlighted the way that some collaborative efforts had integrated food system thinking into their work. The most common kinds of examples were food banks and community housing projects that had begun to
work with AFIs involved in community gardening or community kitchens in attempts to establish social connections and to move beyond the charity model. Perhaps the best example of this is the experience of The Stop Community Food Centre, an organization in Toronto, Ontario that evolved from a food bank offering emergency relief into a thriving neighborhood hub where people come together to grow, cook, and share food, and where people advocate for measures to establish a more just, sustainable, and healthy food system for all (Levkoe and Wakefield 2011). While The Stop has been a pioneer in developing this model, there are other community food hubs across the provincial food networks with a similar vision.

The Harvest Moon Society (HMS) in Manitoba is another example of a community food hub that has actively used the provincial network to develop its cooperative management structure. HMS promotes the importance of rural communities, rural environments, and sustainable agriculture through education, research, and outreach activities. The Local Food Initiative is a project that has developed a network of food buying clubs to enable urban residents access to fresh local meat and produce at a fair price for producers. Using participatory practices to engage rural farmers and urban eaters, HMS also built a community learning centre that hosts a wide variety of educational programs, including university credit courses, agro-environmental events, and community celebrations. HMS’s initiatives are focused on improving economic livelihoods for existing and new farmers, ensuring all people have access to healthy food, and to contributing to a food system where producers and eaters together can take a more active decision-making role.

Another example of a community food hub is Eat Local Sudbury (ELS) in Ontario, an organization that makes connections among food system issues as a core part of their work. ELS is a cooperatively owned and operated storefront that sells food produced within a 150 mile
radius of the city and works to improve the environment, health and economy in the region. The retail store showcases information about food-related issues and at times, doubles as a community gathering space for informal meetings and organized events. Further, the ELS offices behind the store serve as a co-working space that hosts a number of environmental and social justice organizations. In a discussion with staff and board members, the original purpose of ELS was to ensure that farmers received a fair price and had a place to sell their produce. As ELS became involved with other organizations during the creation of the City of Greater Sudbury Food Charter, the cooperative members became more aware if the interconnections between food system issues. One board member explained,

We want to ensure that local food is accessible so people in poverty can afford it. But the producers themselves may be living below the poverty line. Mediating those two issues is a problem and a main focus of what ELS is doing. Typically, [for ELS] social justice has been aimed at the producer end. But more and more through various programs we are addressing the consumer end.

An example of these efforts by ELS to embrace a wider range of programming that engages a more comprehensive food system perspective is its support for the Sudbury Good Food Box. This initiative operates like a buying club where residents pre-pay for a fresh box of fruit and vegetables. The Good Food Box supports local farmers and offers low-income residents an opportunity to purchase fresh, high quality food at affordable prices. Good Food Box members also become connected to a broader network of producers (e.g. farmers, urban gardeners and bakers) and food politics through newsletters and events.

A final example of a community food hub is Just Food in Ottawa Ontario, an organization that runs a wide range of projects that takes a comprehensive food system approach. Just Food began as the Ottawa Food Policy Council but expanded to include a community gardening network, new farmer training, the promotion of local food production and consumption, and advocacy campaigns about promoting a sustainable and just food system. One
of Just Food’s most recent and largest projects to date is a Community Food and Sustainable Agriculture Hub established in 2012. The new hub compliments Just Food’s existing work by providing 75 acres of land, a greenhouse for agroecological farming and community programming, as well as a large house that has been transformed into a community centre. Like the other examples of community food hubs, Just Food’s collaborations with other AFIs and clustering of initiatives have produced mutual benefits from the interaction among different aspects of the food system.

The second set of examples of a comprehensive food system approach is categorized as common projects among unlikely allies. Since many of the AFIs come to the network with different objectives and approaches, attempts to collaborate can result in major tensions. For example, in the interviews I heard repeated stories of AFIs involved in anti-poverty work coming into conflict with producers, despite the fact that both groups were addressing issues of poverty and limited food access as a result of broader structural factors. As described by the concept of a good food gap (in Chapter 2, also see Baker et al. 2010), these kinds of tensions can limit the ability of AFIs to work with others and address food system issues comprehensively. In attempts to circumvent tensions and find ways to collaborate, some AFIs within the networks have engaged in mutually beneficial projects despite disagreements on certain issues. As described in Chapter 6, a central function of the four case study food networks is to encourage interaction among diverse AFIs with the aim of establishing a healthy, ecological and just food system. Speaking to this function, consider the following interaction between three members of the NSFSN:

Member 1: For me it is not about having only one single message but we do have to communicate with one another. It might be that the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council is saying that farmers need more money. The food costing people may be saying that people don’t have enough money. It is all part of the same issue and we need to listen to each other so that we can work together.
Member 2: It is a challenge when you have groups giving different messages. But it is not about everyone using the same message, rather we should build that shared understanding to hear everybody so we can come together around these issues and see the commonality . . . [understanding our] diversity is the only way that we are going to come to a place where we can bring it to a larger systems level and make sense of it and not get caught up in the conflicting messages.

Member 3: We also have to make sure that we don’t leave anyone out of that diversity. The ultimate solution can’t create more social problems than we have or risk working in isolation.

These comments reflect the sentiment embodied by a comprehensive food system approach and demonstrate the way that the networks are actively being used to collaborate with unlikely allies.

An example of unlikely allies coming together to address common concerns was the development of the report, *Is Nova Scotia eating local?* The report was published in 2012 and served as a platform for the alignment of different food system stakeholders. The research for the report was led by the Food Action Committee (FAC) whose mandate is to promote the social, economic, and environmental benefits of growing, processing, distributing and eating local sustainable food. The intention of the report was to examine the costs and benefits of the dominant food system along with the estimated effects of increased spending on local food.

Recognizing that a report focusing on local food needed input from farmers, the FAC developed a partnership with the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA), an association of farmers that supports conventional farming businesses in the province. The report was part of a research, education and policy initiative that explored Nova Scotia’s food system and provided an opportunity for two very different organizations to collaborate on a common project. One of the authors explained, “The report is really about a lot more than just greenhouse gas emissions and how far our food is traveling. We also looked at where our food comes from and how it is being produced and we continue to advocate for broader ecological food production.” Speaking about some of the learning from the collaboration, a representative from the NSFA told me, “We realized that we all agreed with the fundamentals of supporting local farmers and sustainable
food . . . but we diverged on some of the other issues.” During interviews, authors from both the FAC and NSFA explained that the process of writing the report helped to elucidate different perspectives within the food system and find common ground to move forward.

Another example of networks being used to facilitate collaboration between unlikely allies was the many food policy councils and roundtables discussed in the section above. One of the main objectives of food policy councils and roundtables is to bring together actors from across the food system and to find ways to work together. In the case of the WRFSRT, membership is comprised of eighteen representatives from different sectors of the regional food system. While there is no expectation of consensus on every issue, members must endorse the group’s mission in order to participate. Given the diversity of membership, I inquired about the inevitable tensions between the different perspectives. A representative explained that while some interactions could be uncomfortable and difficult at times, creating an inclusive and supportive environment for dialogue increased member’s understanding of the food system and their ability to work together. In these examples, AFIs have used the networks to facilitate unlikely allies coming together around common projects, which contribute to developing a comprehensive food system perspective.

Despite these and other positive collaborative efforts, there were a number of food system issues that had not been adequately addressed. During the interviews, there was an expression among some AFIs that the networks were too insular and more work was required to include specific sectoral and/or geographic issues. For example, in Manitoba and Ontario, some respondents commented that more efforts needed to focus beyond urban areas, primarily in the rural and remote communities and in the north. Suggestions were also made in all provinces to increase the scope of collaborations by encouraging a broader representation of actors from across the food system. For example, a number of responses in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova
Scotia mentioned that more producers needed to be included in the network. In British Columbia, some called for more inclusion of provincial and federal government representatives. In Ontario, some mentioned that francophone, immigrant and Indigenous communities had not been sufficiently engaged. In Manitoba, some AFIs spoke about the lack of radicalized voices and that many AFIs were overly concerned with engaging the mainstream and partnering with the state. In Nova Scotia, some AFIs felt that many of the network members were too closely tied to public health and academic interests, which was skewing the focus of collective efforts.

Beyond the gaps acknowledged above, there was also a distinct lack of AFIs engaging with labour issues. In most cases, the people that plant seeds, harvest crops, prepare, package and deliver foods are not “farmers” in the traditional sense of the term, but are instead farm labourers; and these workers are poorly paid and often work in unacceptable conditions. Further, much of the low-wage labour within the food system tends to be done by racialized and migrant peoples (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Liu and Apollon 2011; UFCW and AWA 2011). There have been some attempts to raise these issues within the networks. For example, in October 2012, AFIs along with representatives from Sustain Ontario and Food Secure Canada/Sécurité alimentaire Canada (FSC-SAC) were part of an interactive public dialogue with Justicia for Migrant Workers (a non-profit collective promoting the rights of migrant farmworkers and farmworkers without status) and United Food and Commercial Workers Union (a union representing members in the food industry) about ways to build relationships. Further, there are documented instances of events and meetings in all of the case study provinces that have involved speakers and/or special sessions addressing labour issues. However, there is little evidence that these issues have been a sustained part of collaborative activities. These omissions represent significant limitations to addressing the multifaceted, interrelated web of elements, activities and relationships that constitute the food system.
**Reflexive localization**

Reflexive localization refers to transcending a static interpretation of “local” while simultaneously preserving and maintaining unique characteristics developed in place. As described within a transformative food politics, local places are important sites for developing knowledge and experience and for strategic mobilization. In my research, I found that many AFIs were able to move beyond their own experiences (rooted in place) by strategically using the networks to make connections across localities and to negotiate the principles of a broader food politics. Traditional notions of “fixed scales” often did not make sense for AFIs within the networks. As I discussed in Chapter 5, for example, many representatives expressed difficulty in identifying their work at any one particular level. Through my research in the case study provinces, I found many examples of ways that the networks were being used strategically by AFIs, rooted in place, to broaden their work and develop a politics of solidarity across sectors, scales, and geographies.

Despite the different issues and contexts in which AFIs are embedded, working within the networks was identified as a place to share differences, learn from others, and better understand the barriers to developing a healthy, ecological and just food system. Discussing the value of multi-scale collaborations, an AFI representative in Ontario commented, “We can’t underestimate how much work needs to be done at the local level . . . First, there must be well established groups with a distinct identity, then they can work with the provincial or federal groups, and see how they fit in.” Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker described the primary role of the PNOs as supporting the networks to translate neighborhood and municipal level experiences into policy proposals and move them forward. She explained, “Sustain Ontario is part of a constant interplay with the federal level and with the municipal and neighbourhood level. Through the
national network [FSC-SAC] we need to be connecting to global movements as well.” These comments relate directly to my discussion in Chapter 6 of how the PNOs develop scalar strategies to organize around and impact provincial level policy.

On a similar note, a member of the BCFSN used the analogy of a nutcracker to explain the need to be working at multiple scales simultaneously:

To crack the nut you’ve got to have pressure from underneath and pressure from the top. We need the grassroots engagement, people voting with their feet and making changes themselves. But we also need the lever from above [i.e. changing government policy] . . . you’ve got to have both. You can’t crack the nut if it’s only coming from one way.

These comments point directly to the way that networks can be part of developing a politics of solidarity capable of reaching across localities. In other words, the networks are a product of the relationships between autonomous AFI where participants bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge that becomes the foundation for collaboration. The following examples of reflexive localization from AFIs working within the networks are organized into two categories: scaling-up and scaling-out placed-based initiative, and building multi-scale collaborations.

The first category of reflexive localization is comprised of examples where AFIs have strategically used the networks to scale-out to other localities and scale-up to address broader social and political processes. FarmStart is an example of a non-profit organization from Guelph, Ontario that has been active in multiple networks, using them to bring its programming to other places as well as to engage provincial and federal level policy issues. FarmStart’s primary work focuses on facilitating, supporting and encouraging a new generation of farmers by providing land, resources and training. The program became so successful that FarmStart was receiving daily requests from farmers across North America interested in becoming involved. While the
needs of individual farmers can be very different, staff told me that they all struggled with similar problems such as the high cost of land, uneven access to markets and a lack of knowledge and skills: “We realized there were issues bigger than our own individual situations that we were all facing and that it was important to articulate them and work together.” In addition, FarmStart staff realized that unless they began to address structural policy issues, their work would be happening “in a vacuum”.

Recognizing the need for broader engagement in transforming the food system, FarmStart took the lead in building a series of sub-networks within the provincial and national networks to scale-out its programs and services and scale-up farmer’s experience to engage broader policy issues. First, FarmStart established the FarmON Alliance through a series of partnerships with Sustain Ontario, Just Food Ottawa, ELS, and the National Farmer’s Union. Supported by a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2008, the FarmON Alliance was established to support a new generation of viable, ecological and locally oriented farmers across the province of Ontario. Second, to address structural barriers to small-scale ecological farming, FarmStart realized that there needed to be substantial organizing around policy work beyond the provincial level. Working with FSC-SAC to bring groups together across Canada, FarmStart began a national conversation about how best to impact provincial and federal policy. A staff member explained, “We didn't create a single voice, or a new organization, but we created a way to start to link up around a policy framework . . . And as a group we can move that forward more than just one organization.” FarmStart staff made clear to me that their efforts to scale-up and scale-out their programs would not have been possible without the existing networks.

Another example of networks offering a strategic opportunity for scaling-up and scaling-out the experience of place-based AFIs is the People’s Food Policy (PFP). The PFP officially
began in 2008 to develop Canada’s first (and only) citizen-led comprehensive food policy (see *Chapter 4* for a more detailed explanation of the PFP). The process of creating the PFP engaged hundreds of AFIs by coordinating a series of “kitchen table talks” in local communities that collected the experiences and ideas around changing the food system. Kitchen table talks were hosted in all four the case study provinces, often with the PNOs taking a lead role in organizing provincial-wide discussions or supporting AFIs to put together their own events (the participation of the PNOs by hosting kitchen table talks was discussed in *Chapter 6* as the construction of “scalar strategies”). Using various methods, participants were asked to begin from their personal experiences and to share stories of struggle and hope about a different kind of food system. These stories were recorded and used to support federal-level policy proposals around a series of themes that emerged out of the diversity of perspectives from the participants. Writing teams synthesized the different recommendations coming out of local experiences to create a series of discussion papers that presented a guide for transformative action at the national level. As described by reflexive localization, the PFP became a national network hat built solidarity through sharing local knowledge and experiences across the country. By producing a federal-level policy document, the ideas generated in local places became part of a broader collaborative process to produce a collaborative critique of the dominant food system.

The second category of reflexive localization involves examples of efforts to build collaborations that bring together place-based AFIs to learn from one another and develop broader political action. A key example of this is the BCFSN’s decision to organize its members according to bioregions (discussed in *Chapter 6* as part of PNOs constructing “virtual spaces”). In part, this decision reflects a desire to move beyond fixed scales of organizing and to encourage trans-local solidarities. Besides increasing communication between initiatives, a bioregional approach demonstrates that political levels (e.g. ward, municipality, town, etc.) don’t
always make sense to communities and AFIs. For example, an leader from an Indigenous food network and member of the BCFSN spoke about that way that “arbitrary” boarders had historically divided her community, separating families and creating regulations that limited access to traditional foods. According to a board member with the BCFSN, “The idea with bioregionalism is that you self-define your own networks and build them. Not everyone in every community is going to come to a gathering, and participate in the listserv. But if different people can bring the information back and forth, then it strengthens everybody.” The idea behind organizing the network in this way was to enable autonomous AFIs to work together in self-defined regions. The BCFSN’s mandate has been to bring those regions together at a provincial level and to make national and global connections. Another network member commented, “You can’t isolate our food system. We need to be working all over the place to have an impact. For example, working here to transform our food system is connected to China, Boston, California, Mexico and all other places.” Since the shift to bioregional organizing, a BCFSN board member in charge of communications told me that there had been a significant growth of sub-networks to bring together place-based AFIs. According to their records, the BCFSN estimates that there are currently over 30 sub-networks operating across British Columbia.

The work of Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is another example of AFIs actively building multi-scale collaborations. VCH is one of six British Columbia Health Authorities and serves about 25% of the province’s population. As part of this work since 2005, VCH administers funds to AFIs through the Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI). The fund is targeted at organizations focusing on low-income communities, increasing access to healthy food, building community capacity, and developing policy to support community food security. According to members of the BCFSN, VCH is the only health authority that has used CFIA funds to support grassroots AFIs as well providing opportunities for regional and provincial
collaboration through new and existing networks. For example, one BCFSN board member told me that when they were initially hired into a CFAI funded position they had no previous experience in community organizing around food system issues. With VCH’s support they were sent to the BCFSN gathering and made valuable connections that supported their work. VCH has also provided opportunities to scale-up place-based work to impact policy. Discussing an example of these efforts in relation to recent work in Vancouver’s downtown east side, a VCH representative explained, “We started bringing together researchers, food advocates, and housing providers to help British Columbia Housing [a provincial supportive housing agency] develop a food policy.” Recognizing that a number of food initiatives were already taking place across the social housing sector, VCH used its position to build collaborations that encouraged the different actors to come together, share their experiences and make the case for changing policy.

In Nova Scotia, ACT for CFS (introduced in Chapter 4) provides another example of using the provincial network to bring AFIs together and develop broader political action. In a discussion about their decision to play a lead role in the project, NSFSN members pointed to the capacity of ACT for CFS to connect local projects through participatory processes. “The project,” explained one network member “is about changing the food system through changing ways of working and building relationships. It is about adopting a critical lens to look at the current Nova Scotia food system and finding ways through conversation, relationships and analysis to have an impact.” The project began by conducting participatory assessments focusing on people’s experiences of how food was being produced and accessed in Nova Scotia. A central part of this work was to identify the barriers and opportunities for change within government and other institutions. Using the assessment as a catalyst, over 50 project partners participated in reflective dialogue to share knowledge and skills and to plan collaborative strategic actions. Central to its participatory values, the project uses the experiences of local AFIs to construct new
knowledge and opportunities necessary for changing the food system. A member of both the ACT for CFS project management team and the NSFSN coordinating committee commented, “I see the ‘ah ha’ moments that happen when people realize that a specific policy, which may seem irrelevant to food, actually impacts their community’s food security. That is when the connection is made.” These kinds of initiatives that engage place-based knowledge and experiences and work across sectors, scales and geography exemplify the way that networks are being used strategically to further the realization of a reflexive localization. In these examples, the strategic use of networks provides an opportunity for collaboration between localities and for connecting local efforts to broader social and political processes.

While there are many examples of AFIs using the networks to engage in practices of reflexive localization, my research also found some significant limitations among the collaborative initiatives. According to the network survey, the most common barrier to collaboration among all the case study provinces was limited time and resources. For some it was a matter of limited finances to attend gatherings or technology to engage in the virtual communities. For others, lack of time to engage in activities beyond their local work was a major factor. A brief examination of the provincial gathering rosters indicates that participation was generally limited to larger AFIs who could pay their staff or for volunteers to attend. As I discussed in Chapter 6, most of the PNOs have attempted to rectify this by offering bursaries and other supports to participants.

For some AFIs, a perceived loss of autonomy was also a barrier that constrained participation in the networks. This concern was expressed through comments that collaborating with others who did not understand the particular context might threaten local control or impose ideas. Further, some commented that their organization’s leadership and/or funders did not see
collaboration as a priority. For example, one AFI expressed apprehension about participating in the network due to a concern that they might “lose control of the outcome”. These kinds of comments were most prevalent among more established AFIs such as those that were more entrenched in a particular community, had longer histories, or those with larger budgets and more extensive programming.

Finally, the research showed many examples of place-based AFIs coming together to work across localities using the networks as a strategic tool. However, these same AFIs had limited involvement with other national level-networks and with those at the global scale. While there have been a number of pan-Canadian efforts to establish sustain collaboration at the national level (e.g. Chapter 4 discussed the evolution of FSC-SAC and Canadian Association for Food Studies/l’Association canadienne des études sur l’alimentation), the discussions with AFIs revealed limited collaborations beyond the provincial scale. FSC-SAC has made efforts to include global food sovereignty networks (e.g. La Via Campasina) in national gatherings as keynote speakers and workshop presenters, but there have been few sustained connections or partnerships.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore how networks can facilitate a transformative food politics by highlighting examples of AFIs that are actively collaborating with others to further their objectives and goals. Using the three elements of a transformative food politics, I have demonstrated that transformative work is already happening within the networks along with some further opportunities and areas for improvement. In this section, I summarize the findings presented above in relation to the literature describing the three elements
of a transformative food politics. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the three elements of a transformative food politics as well as examples and limitations of collaborative activities.

Reflecting on the first element of a transformative food politics – collective subjectivity – there were numerous examples of AFIs strategically using the networks to shift from individualized market mechanisms as the mode for change to collaborative mobilization around collective needs. From the case study provinces, examples included cooperative governance, public engagement and the politicization and empowerment of individuals to act collectively to address common needs. These examples demonstrate the way that through collaborative initiatives, AFIs are challenging dominant social relations here and now. The examples suggest that AFIs are shifting from individual market-based solutions (e.g. acting strictly as a consumer or producer) towards ones that embed food within meaningful cultural and community relations while improving production of and access to good, healthy food for all. Further, these examples all demonstrate the way that food is being used as a point of entry for deeper political engagement. The examples also showed that some collaborative initiatives remain focused on education with the goal of influencing personal behaviour. While this may be viewed as reproducing neoliberal ideals, it was also evident that education is often used as an entry point into broader political action. The research also revealed that some of the AFIs were hesitant to engage in explicit critiques of government and corporate institutions. This tension highlights the challenges of building broad-based strategic relationships, especially those involving stakeholders that are deeply embedded in the corporate led industrial food system.
Table 7.1: Summary of the elements of a transformative food politics, examples of collaborative activities and limitations of collaborative activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformative Food Politics</th>
<th>Examples of Collaborative Activities</th>
<th>Limitations of Collaborative Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Subjectivity</strong></td>
<td>• meets individual needs and desires, engages differences, and identifies shared interests and mutual benefits</td>
<td>• engage in cooperative governance (e.g., collaborative ownership, management and decision-making)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• uses food as a strategic tool for political action</td>
<td>• promote public engagement (e.g., through food policy councils and roundtables)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• establish collaborations that politicize and empower individuals to act collectively</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensive Food System Approach</strong></td>
<td>• builds bridges between different issues</td>
<td>• develop community food hubs (i.e. infrastructure that integrates food-related initiatives to create synergies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• brings diverse groups into dialogue</td>
<td>• create common projects among unlikely allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• decreases the perceived divisions between farmers and eaters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflexive Localization</strong></td>
<td>• develop multi-scalar strategies</td>
<td>• scale-up (to broader social and political processes) and scale-out (to other localities) local initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• provide strategic opportunity for place-based AFIs to connect to broader social and political processes</td>
<td>• build multi-scale collaborations</td>
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</table>
From the second element of a transformative food politics - a comprehensive food system approach - the examples showed that networks offer opportunities that support AFIs to adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted, interrelated web of elements, activities and relationships that constitute the food system. The examples from the case study provinces suggest that that networks have been used to build bridges between different issues and sectors to include more interrelated approaches through the development of community food hubs and creating collaborations among unlikely allies. However, the research also revealed that some AFIs perceived the networks as overly insular and insufficiently addressing specific food system issues. For example, there was little participation from rural and remote communities and northern populations in collaborative initiatives. Further, AFIs had limited association with labour organizations in any of the provincial food networks. This gap is important because of the large numbers and importance of labourers involved in the production, distribution and processing of food that are not currently connected to the networks.

From the third element of a transformative food politics - a politics of reflexive localization - examples showed that networks were being used by place-based AFIs to expand their work to other places (scale-out) and to connect local projects to broader social and political efforts (scale-up). However, the research also found that participation in networks was severely limited by some AFI’s lack of time and resources. While this was a structural problem within the sector, some felt that more should be done to make collaboration more inclusive. Some AFIs also felt that being too involved in the networks could lead to a loss of autonomy. Since the provincial food networks are constituted by autonomous AFIs, their future will depend on collaborations that can build strong and stable collaborations without overly constraining the ability of AFIs to continue their own work. Finally, despite the wealth of activities occurring within the provinces, there were limited connections being made with other networks at the national and global levels.
While the PNOs are involved in bridging initiatives between other networks (as described in Chapter 6), most AFIs had little knowledge about the kinds of efforts and connections taking place beyond the provincial level. This is a concern because a transformative food politics necessitates understanding and addressing the logics of the increasingly globalized food system, at all scales. As the literature suggests, using networks to work across scales - e.g., through “jumping scales” (Smith 1992; Swyngedouw 1997) and/or “boomerang strategies” (Keck and Sikkink 1998) - can take advantage of strategic connections between groups working at the local, provincial, national and global levels (DeFilippes 2001; Juris 2008).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that transformative work is already happening within the networks. The examples highlighted here are only selections, drawn from numerous other collaborative activities using the networks to further their goals and objectives. In this chapter I have demonstrated that the networks provide AFIs with a strategic opportunity to collaborate and develop transformative orientations, but that these efforts have some significant limitations that must be addressed. I have also suggested that while AFIs might locate themselves in opposition to the dominant food system, it is the same system that has established the conditions for their existence. In other words, AFIs are deeply embedded in the corporate led industrial food system, and a transformative food politics demands challenging that system on multiple fronts.

Collaborative efforts are a necessary part of transformative action, but they are not the final goal. Networks are not inherently progressive, democratic or egalitarian – and are often used for divergent ends. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, it is the way in which the networks are used and the content of the collaborations that matters.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

The balance of forces cannot be changed unless these fragmented movements - such as the movements for food sovereignty, food justice and food democracy - forge a common platform based on some common grounds. I call these “convergence in diversity”: that is recognizing the diversity, not only of movements, which are fragmented, but of the political forces that are operating with them, of the ideologies and even visions of the future of those political forces.
~ Samir Amin, Director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal (quoted in Holt-Giménez 2011: p. xvii)

In this dissertation I have focused on the increasing diversity of alternative food initiatives (AFIs) that have emerged in response to concerns about the corporate-led industrial food system. While many of these AFIs have had some significant successes, recent studies have raised questions around their approach and practice. Critics have suggested that some AFIs have adopted a selective interpretation of the problems within the food system, and that their activities therefore, have been limited in both scale and scope. In general, these AFIs are seen to be an inadequate response to the complex problems within the food system, and to be complicit in propagating neoliberal ideals and facilitating the retrenchment of the state. While these critics have identified important challenges among AFI activity, they tend to consider AFIs as operating independently on particular projects, with specific claims, or in isolated sectors of the food system. Even scholars that make reference to an elusive “food movement” rarely explain what it is or what unites it, or discuss its significance as part of broader food system change. There has been little documentation or analysis that has situated AFIs within a broader community of practice, or considered the ensuing potential for a transformative food politics.

In an effort to better understand the possibilities and limitations for food system transformation, my research has investigated the increasing collaborations among food-related
organizations through provincial networks in Canada. The objective of this research has been to examine what role AFI networks, rather than individual initiatives play in developing resistance to the corporate led industrial food system. I have paid particular attention to efforts that foster and maintain these networks by exploring their history, structure and processes of collaboration. Unlike previous studies that describe AFIs working in isolation, I have explored the ways that organizations are collectively working towards a healthy, ecological and just food system. By providing a different, more network-focused analysis; my aim has been to identify ways that networks are transforming the food system and to explore the particular strategies being mobilized. To investigate the provincial food networks, I engaged in a community-based, participatory research process that involved case studies of four provincial food networks in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. I drew on the concept of assemblages as an analytical tool to consider the way diverse food initiatives are mobilizing across sectors, scales and geographies. I have demonstrated that analyzing the interrelationships between AFIs elucidates the broader assemblage as a living and evolving entity with the ability to learn and change through critical reflection. I developed a framework for a transformative food politics and used three elements – collective subjectivity, a comprehensive food system, and reflexive localization - to examine the collaborative activities taking place.

In this dissertation, I have shown that failing to understand the structure, role and strategic use of AFI networks produces an incomplete picture of the struggles surrounding the food system. This narrow perspective may unintentionally normalize dominant practices, reinforce myopic perspectives that individualize food projects, thus overlooking important political struggles and limiting the possibilities for future action. Most AFIs are embedded in a particular experience in place, and they develop grounded knowledge about specific issues with local communities. Participation in networks provides an opportunity for AFIs to share their
experiences with others from different places and with different perspectives. Increased interaction and relationship building provides new opportunities for developing food system solutions. Networks can also help to recognize and privilege new forms of social empowerment in the niches, spaces and margins of capitalism. For example, a community garden may seem like a relatively neutral initiative but, connected to a broader network of AFIs through a community food hub, it can be a powerful space for reclaiming the commons, putting food in community control, and building engaged, informed and knowledgeable citizens with the power to reclaim control of the food system (for example, see Chapter 7). Collaboration across sectors, scales and geographies offers the potential to realize and work towards these kinds of longer-term, structural actions necessary for transforming the food system.

My findings reveal that the structure and function of the provincial food networks are different from the way that social movement networks have often been described in the literature. I demonstrated that the networks could be characterized as assemblages constituted by the self-organization of diverse actors through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. According to some social network theory (see, for example, Diani 1992a; 1992b; Saunders 2007), the food networks explored here might be considered nascent or even ineffective due to the lack of consensus around a common target or a shared project. However, considering the findings from this research, it is evident that these networks are not simply “emerging” or somehow incomplete. Using a community-based action research approach, I have demonstrated that the complex arrangements of actors within networks such as these are likely to function well (and perhaps better) even in the absence of clear leaders. The results also challenge the binary lens often used to interpret AFI activity (i.e. AFIs as oppositional vs. complicit) to develop a more nuanced understanding of the way social movement networks work. This implies that open, relatively unbounded networks are an
important part of fundamentally restructuring not just how we eat, but also our social relations. In my research, I found that AFIs were using networks to challenge the rules and institutions of the corporate led industrial food system and to develop participatory and democratic practices that actively challenge the neoliberal logic. These experiments demonstrate how a different kind of (food) system could function, and thereby push the logics of system transformation. Thus, besides developing viable alternatives to the dominant food system, AFIs are involved in prefigurative ways of being - establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations - in the belly of the existing (food) system.

**Major Findings**

There are four major findings that emerged from my research. First, *Chapter 4* demonstrates that collaborative and sustained attention to food system change in Canada has deep historical roots. While there is documentation of a long history of social mobilization around specific food-related issues and sectors, to date, there has been little consideration of the way that these diverse groups have come together to address food from a system-wide perspective. To fill this gap, I traced this history of collaboration through broad-based networks from the People’s Food Commission in the late 1970s - the first large-scale comprehensive mobilization addressing the food system. I demonstrated that the provincial food networks were constituted by (historically and geographically) contextualized and overlapping networks of actors and spaces. Focusing on key moments within the case study provinces, I also elucidated the establishment of the four provincial network organizations (PNOs). These organizations are particularly important to this research because of their explicit efforts to foster and sustain the networks, their focus on collaboration across sectors, scales and geography, as well as their
mandate to transform the food system. Through an historical analysis of cross-provincial food network development, I demonstrated that there is a history of food-related organizations collaborating in Canada. Further, contrary to assumptions that AFIs act in isolation, I show that they are part of ongoing mobilizations through robust provincial networks.

Second, investigating the structure and constitution of the provincial food networks, in Chapter 5 I explored the dynamic forms of collaboration being undertaken within the networks and the opportunities and challenges for movement building. Specifically, evidence showed that while the provincial networks exhibit some elements of a collective identity, network members have diverse objectives, approaches and tactics that do not always align into a coherent political program. In addition, while all four provincial networks have a high level of interconnectivity, they are extremely decentralized, with no actors who completely dominate the network. Further, the majority of survey respondents identified as being connected to the idea of a collective food movement. Building on this data, I have demonstrated that analyzing networks as assemblages helps to visualize and understand that initiatives with diverse goals and approaches can work together without ideological coherence.

The third major finding that emerged from my research is that despite the low levels of centrality, the PNOs all hold relatively more central positions in the provincial networks than other AFIs (see Chapter 5). This is not surprising since the PNOs each evolved from a perceived need to bring together local AFIs and foster collaboration by strengthening the networks. In Chapter 6, I examined the PNO’s efforts to bring diverse and disparate AFIs together and to foster and sustain these connections in the absence of central coordinating mechanisms. As network weavers, the PNOs have each established a series of networking strategies that aim to bring together organizational initiatives from across sectors, scales and geographies. I identified
three of the most common types: 1) the provision of physical spaces that involve direct contact in particular places where AFIs meet face-to-face; 2) the provision of virtual spaces where connections are mediated through different technologies; and, 3) scalar strategies where AFIs use different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects to organize around and impact provincial level policy. The role of weavers within these network formations is not only to develop networking strategies, but also to navigate potential ideological conflicts as well as material and discursive power relations that emerge from the interactions within those spaces. I suggested that addressing the tensions is an important way to build trust and should not be avoided to appease short-term objectives. While tensions can impede the networking strategies, engaging and negotiating the differences between AFIs may also enhance the provincial food networks.

The fourth major finding from my research is that the food networks provide a strategic opportunity for AFIs to mobilize and to develop transformative orientations. Using the critiques of AFIs, I developed a framework to analyze collaborative activities through three interrelated elements – collective subjectivities, a comprehensive food system approach, and reflexive localization. Applying these elements to the case studies in Chapter 7, I demonstrated that transformative work is already happening within the networks. I also identified some key areas of improvement for future collaborations. Specifically, my research found that through the networks, AFIs are engaging in collaborative mobilization around collective needs, adopting an inclusive and comprehensive approach that considers the interrelated aspects of the food system, and building connections across localities to negotiate the principles of a broader food politics. I argued that collaboration among AFIs reveals much more than only an oppositional politics - a key feature that typically defines social movement activity (Tarrow 2011). I have shown the ways that AFIs are responding to the critiques about their discourse and practices, and are
transcending specific issues and locales through networks. In so, AFIs are re-scaling the politics of food in Canada. Through networks, AFIs are working collectively in a critical and reflexive way to build the foundations for a different kind of (food) system.

These findings offer a major contribution to our understanding of how collaborative food networks operate and engage with problems and solutions in the food system. For this study, I engaged in the research process through a navigation of the spaces between being an insider and outsider in collaboration with the provincial food networks. Having worked with various AFIs over the past fifteen years, I drew on my personal connections and built new relationships with the partners and participants. This put me in a unique position that allowed for the collection of a depth and scope of data with the AFIs in context that would not have been possible using traditional methods. I was also able to support the networks throughout the research process by providing a broader understanding of the ideas and activities of the diverse AFIs in different places. By creating opportunities to share information and resources (e.g. in the discussions, popular education workshops, and data summaries), network actors were able to learn from the research and use the findings to strategically develop their practices. Reflecting on the benefits of this research as praxis, I am reminded of the valuable role that academics can play in social movement networks as an active part of the assemblages. As I argued in Chapter 3, my use of a CBR framework increased the quality and validity of the research results and contributed to progressive social change efforts. For me, the publication of this dissertation will mark another level of engagement in the collaborative food networks.
Convergence in Diversity

The main findings that have emerged from this dissertation point to the dynamic forms and functions of the provincial food networks. In this section I consider the different kinds of relationships and collaborative initiatives to suggest some future directions for AFIs and PNOs that may enhance the networks. The research has revealed that AFIs are engaged in collaborative provincial food networks that are interminable, self-organized networks of diverse actors constituted through non-hierarchical, bottom-up processes with multiple and overlapping points of contact. Conceptualizing the networks as assemblages means that they cannot be fully controlled; however, actors are not powerless. The underlying purpose of using an assemblage analysis is two-fold: first, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of the provincial food networks, and second, to foster and support AFIs in their collective efforts to transform the food system. Transforming any one element of the food system demands considering and acting on the multitude of internal and external factors that impact that system. No single AFI or PNO can possibly accomplish this task alone, and nor should they. While the AFIs and PNOs are an important part of the food networks, they cannot be substituted for the “food movement”. Social movements require substantial popular mobilization (Pithouse 2013) and while PNOs and AFIs may use democratic models and support movement activity (see Chapter 6), they are also accountable to funders and boards of directors. Thus, while AFIs and PNOs can play an important strategic role, networks should be used as a strategic tool to build a broad-based popular movement to address the complexity of local and regional concerns along with the impact of global issues. According to the findings from this dissertation, the realization of a transformative food politics points to the need for a convergence in diversity, as suggested in the quote from Samir Amin leading this chapter. I concur with this sentiment and build on the idea of convergence in diversity as network building among the diversity of AFIs and PNOs,
individuals, and other groups (that are not directly connected to food issues), and the multiple visions of a different kind of future.

In this research, I have pointed to many successful and problematic examples of ways that a convergence in diversity might be realized. The challenge for network actors is to continue to propagate development of the network without overly centralizing and controlling it. This task includes reflecting on the constitution and context of the existing collaborations, identifying where diverse transformative orientations/experiences exist, and then shifting and realigning network configurations accordingly. This may mean that one or more AFIs take a leadership role for a limited period of time, but it also demands ensuring that power is equitably distributed throughout the network. For example, the work of creating and sustaining broad-based networks must be predicated on a commitment to engaging difficult questions around class, race and gender. This would include ensuring that those that have been most marginalized by the dominant food system are at the forefront of leadership and decision-making. The concept of assemblages suggest that shifts and flows are happening all the time, some visible and some hidden. Recognizing the wealth of existing relationships and continuing to build new ones ensures that different perspectives and strategies are always available.

Throughout this dissertation, I have empirically demonstrated that the strength of the networks is in the diversity of approaches and strategies being mobilized and in their potential complimentary functions. In Chapter 2, I discussed the warrior-builder-weaver framework that argues systemic transformation demands interconnected strategies as opposed to a singular strategic alternative (Stevenson et al. 2008; for similar arguments and schemas see Wright 2010 and Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). Central to this framework is the way that warrior and builder initiatives can be mutually beneficial when brought together by weavers. Alone, each
would be insufficient, but as interconnected complementarities, they can push the logics of system transformation opening space for future action. In other words, using the network to weave connections can support the development of strategic and conceptual linkages within and between different activities. For example, warrior initiatives directed at the capitalist system alone, are unlikely to have a significant impact, but ruptures in state and corporate institutions have the potential to expose system dysfunction and open up possibilities for other types of action (for example, see Barndt 2002; Stevenson et al. 2008; Holloway 2010; Wright 2010).

Builder activities tend to have an expressed focus on community self-reliance through local decision-making outside of state and/or corporate control. In the short term, builder initiatives may not appear to challenge the interests of the dominant classes (for example, see Allen’s [1999] discussion of community food security initiatives). However, complimented by warrior initiatives, in the long-term builder work can explore and create models that shift the balance of power towards broader social empowerment (Stevenson et al. 2008; Wright 2010).

Many of the collaborative initiatives reviewed in in this dissertation would be associated with builder initiatives that seek to create new social, economic and political structures. While these activities are a fundamental part of transformative efforts, they focus primarily on creating alternatives within the existing food system, as opposed to confrontational strategies that directly target exploitative social structures. Warrior-oriented initiatives were not completely absent from the provincial networks, but were far less prevalent. There were few examples of collaborative activities that would be associated with interventionist strategies that directly challenge dominant power relations. As described in the research findings, some network actors expressed concern about becoming too deeply involved in warrior work for fears of alienating network members and damaging relationships with partners in the public and private sectors. For example, as PNOs have developed relationships with governments they tend to make choices about which strategic
orientations to emphasize. While there are some groups working on food issues that have adopted direct-action strategies (e.g., Justicia for Migrant Workers, Put Food in the Budget), few have had significant or sustained engagement with the provincial networks.

A convergence in diversity does not mean sacrificing politics, a point emphasized by the quote from Raj Patel leading Chapter 2. Addressing neoliberalism and issues of race, gender and class are fundamental to a transformative food politics. While some may feel that these issues can be overly divisive, I would argue that this is precisely the work that the network weavers need to be doing. For example, recent efforts by Sustain Ontario and FSC/SAC to bring representatives from Justicia for Migrant Workers into the conversation about food system solutions illustrate both the tensions and possibilities of engaging in uncomfortable conversations (see Chapter 7). While involvement of warrior-oriented strategies in provincial level organizing could threaten some relationships, builder initiatives alone may do little to create broader social transformation.

Transforming the food system demands addressing the core problems as opposed to only the symptoms. One way that I have discussed these core problems (in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) is through the paradox of increasing rates of food insecurity – both globally (FAO 2012a) and in Canada (Health Canada 2007) – paralleled by the fact that more than enough food is currently being produced to feed the world’s population (FAO 2012b). Also, despite the innovations in production technologies, since 1985, farmers in Canada have earned a net income of less than zero while agribusiness corporations have seen record profits (Qualman 2011). The issue then, is not scarcity but politics. Hunger is the result of poverty resulting from the way the dominant (food) system is organized. While these issues remain central realities, I have argued that a transformative food politics is also about building relationships, challenging inequality (of all
types, but particularly in relation to class, race, and gender), celebrating culture, nourishing the environment, and increasing equitable participation.

Finally, we should be under no illusion that the food system can be transformed in isolation from broader struggles for an alternative future. AFIs, regardless of how well they function, cannot transform existing social relations alone. However, using the networks strategically to build relationships, AFIs have developed collaborative solutions in the here and now and could impact other movements through encounters around food. Establishing alliances with other politicized movements in Canada such as labour, Indigenous peoples and others (e.g. global justice, Occupy, autonomous media, etc.) are an important starting point. Thus, food could provide an object of unity for a broader and more politicized social movement.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The empirical research in my dissertation encompasses four provinces, almost three decades of history, about thirty organizations, and hundreds of individuals from across Canada. Taking on a project of this scope has meant sacrificing a certain degree of depth to accommodate a wide scan and cross-comparison of case studies. Decisions about the direction of this research have forced me to make specific choices about what to include and what to leave out. In this final section, I point to six general limitations of my study and make some suggestions for future research.

First, for this study I took an organizational level analysis in recognition that food networks consist of many different configurations of actors. While I could have included individual actors in the analysis, this would have made the network mapping much more time consuming and would have forced me to presuppose factors that characterized network
affiliation. My decision to focus on an organizational level analysis was an attempt to contain the research to target groups of individuals actively involved in collaborative efforts as opposed to individuals making lifestyle decisions. The sample population was therefore not intended to be representative of all individuals involved in food related efforts. Instead, I attempted to capture a wide representation of collaborative initiatives. Focusing my analysis on organizations was one way to understand the role of the networks and how they function. However, while the research subjects represented their organizations, most of their thoughts, ideas, and experiences were personal. In the same way the networks are constituted by multiple different AFIs, the organizations themselves are each made up of a range of individuals with different ideas, approaches and perspectives. I administered the survey and held interviews with senior level staff and/or volunteers in an attempt to gain a representative perspective (since in most cases these individuals are responsible for overall organizational direction). If I had spoken to multiple staff and/or volunteers in a single organization, I would likely have received a more diverse range of responses.

While measuring individual level perspectives was not the purpose of this study, future research could examine the way that staff and volunteers within one organization perceive the mandate and activities differently. Further, it would be valuable to study individual’s motivations for involvement in AFIs and to look more closely at individual connections and perspectives within the food networks. Thus, I acknowledge that this study may not be representative of all activities taking place within the food networks, but it is an important place to begin unpacking the illusive concept of the “food movement,” which future research will undoubtedly advance.

Second, this research attempted to engage a broad range of subjects, but there are lots of organizations that are not included in this study that would consider themselves a part of the
networks. There are many reasons that groups may have been missed or overlooked. For example, some groups may not have identified with the targeted population (i.e. described in the survey as “organizations or groups working on food-related issues”). Others may not have had access or chose not to complete the initial survey for various reasons. There is a noticeable absence of groups representing specific segments of the food system, namely migrant labourers and food service workers. There are varying reasons for this, such as the politicized nature of their work (e.g., fear of repercussions) and disagreements between organizational philosophies. These barriers have begun to break down in recent years, as evidenced by outreach efforts from PNOs and broader increasing participation in food network events. There was also little representation in the study from governments and from the private sector, despite the fact that these sectors were identified in the survey as playing a significant role in the provincial networks. As a result, this study tends to focus more on civil society organizations. With more time and capacity, future research could explore the broader array of actors involved in the networks as well as reasons why certain groups are, or are not involved. Further studies could also build on the gaps I have identified in this research to consider network mobilization tactics, including the opportunities and barriers to establishing new alliances. This would entail reflecting on ways existing relationships that constitute the networks may result in the exclusion of certain groups.

Following from this observation, while the networks are primarily constituted by civil society organizations, my research identified that they include groups from the public (e.g. food policy councils, agriculture departments and other government offices, public health) and private sectors (e.g. cooperatives, small businesses). More research is required to explore the role that these sectors play in the networks and the ways they might be strategically involved and/or excluded from moving from transformative efforts.
Fourth, the survey for this research was administered in November 2010, over two years before the completion of the writing. This timing was necessary to have the survey results early enough in the research process to determine who to interview and to collect some basic information to ground the other discussions. However, it also means that the responses may be outdated and represent only a moment in time. From experience working in the networks and from reflections on the findings, the networks are consistently changing. For example, as some AFIs disappear, people move on to different endeavors and new AFIs arise. While this makes the research challenging, it also reinforces the fluid and evolving nature of the networks. Future research could re-administer the survey and redo the network mapping to provide comparative results and an additional layer of analysis.

Fifth, this research was limited to a study of the provincial scale, focusing primarily on local, regional and provincial level organizations and networks. In general, the data shows that PNOs developed scalar strategies where AFIs used different levels of government (i.e. municipal, provincial, national) to scale-up local projects to organize around and impact provincial level policy (see Chapter 6). Further, AFIs used the networks strategically to expand their work to other places (scale-out) and to connect local projects to broader social and political efforts (scale-up) (see Chapter 7). Thus, while many food initiatives are place-based, they have used the networks to work at multiple levels. These findings challenge traditional notions of scale as a fixed or pre-given, instead suggesting that scale is contingent and relational, produced through social struggle. However, while the networks are trans-local and use multiple scalar strategies, the research also found that AFIs have limited interaction at the national and even less at the global level. This is surprising considering the vibrant and expanding food sovereignty movement connecting local people and organizations across the globe (see for example Desmarais 2007; Wittman et al. 2010; Holt-Giménez 2012). Future research could investigate the
opportunities and barriers of network building at other scales. Further, research could also explore these broader scalar relations within and between the networks as well as the possibility that understanding these kinds of networks requires an alternative concept of scale such as Marston et al.’s (2005) proposal for flat ontologies.

Finally, this study focuses primarily on the human actors within the provincial food networks, despite the assertion made by the assemblage analysis that the networks are also constituted by non-human entities. In the case of the food system, these may include, for example, different discourses, interests, knowledge, legislation, policies, soil, seeds, technologies, and food itself. As others have discussed, networks “organize and are organized by a range of human and non-human actors, through systems of accumulation, extraction, investment, growth, reproduction, exchange, cooperation, and coercion” (Robbins 2012: 212, see also Latour 2005). Non-human entities can have a major influence, not only in bringing the network together, but also in determining its direction and how it functions. This ontological perspective enables further opportunity to understand and impact the networks and for progressive political action and transformative change. Future research could explore the role that non-human actors play in the networks and their interrelationships within human and other non-human actors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the primary contribution of this dissertation is my study of AFIs in context, through a rich empirical approach in regards to social change. The exploration of the networked character of AFIs provides a sophisticated way to think about how AFIs are strategically using provincial food networks to transform the food system. While the case studies in this dissertation
have focused on food system transformation, the concepts I have developed may be useful to study other kinds of network mobilization. Specifically, my findings might provide insight to further research on both the instrumental and prefigurative value of networks and the way they can be a model of, and model for establishing democratic governance structures, building new institutions, and engaging in different kinds of social relations.

This research will - and already has - lead to improved collaboration within the networks. The information presented in this dissertation will provide AFIs and PNOs with a better understanding of the networks in which they are working. This will lead to a better use of the networks to address food system changes in the short, medium and long-term. Further, my community-based action research and mixed methods approach serves as a contribution to both scholarly research and the food movement. Using this approach to research, the processes has increased connections and provided opportunities for reflection within and between networks. Through the interviews, popular education workshops, presentations, and the published newsletters, articles and reports, ideas and information have already been shared across localities. My descriptions of the food networks have contributed to meaningful conversations among network actors about their practice.

The main purpose of this dissertation has been to study contemporary forms of social mobilization in order to better understand the possibilities and limitations for building a healthy, ecological and just food system. This research has demonstrated that many AFIs rooted in place have made strategic connections through the provincial networks and engaged in collaborative processes of interaction. Rather than AFIs being an end in and of themselves, they are part of an ongoing process of sharing, learning and changing. Far from being embryonic, marginal, and ineffective, they constitute a powerful force for addressing immediate concerns and for building
the foundations for a different kind of food system. The interaction of a wide range of groups lays the groundwork for mass mobilization that can, and has, challenged the orthodoxy of the corporate led industrial food system. Beyond experimenting with alternatives, AFI networks are developing and promoting a new political imaginary that makes the realization of other worlds possible.
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Appendix A
Network Survey

Email Introduction

Please consider taking 15 minutes of your time to strengthen [the provincial network organization] by helping us to collect information on food networking in the province. A survey by researches at the University of Toronto in affiliation with [the provincial network organization], is aimed at all organizations and groups in [province] working on food related issues. Please have one representative of your group or organization fill in this survey. Click here to proceed [hyperlink] or cut and paste the following address into your web browser: [web address – preset link].

Survey Introduction

Provincial food networks are emerging to address challenges within the dominant food system and develop viable, localized responses. Researchers from the University of Toronto and [the provincial network organization] are hoping to learn more about how provincial food networks work through this survey. In addition, a few organizations that participate in the survey will be asked to join an in-depth study of the network.

All organizations and groups in [province] working on food related issues are welcome to participate - please have one representative from your organization or group fill it out.

Responses to this survey are confidential. The name of your organization WILL be made public in the study, but specific comments will not be connected to organizations once the data is summarized. Contact information (including names) will only be used to invite specific organizations to participate in the interview stage of the research and will be stored separately from your answers – once participants for the interviews have been selected, this information will be destroyed. As you fill out this survey, keep in mind that you do not have to answer any question you don’t want to and you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this survey, please click NEXT to consent to participate in this study.

If you have questions or concerns, contact Charles Z Levkoe, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography and Program in Planning, University of Toronto (email: charles.levkoe@utoronto.ca)

If you have any concerns about this research or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto (tel: 416-946-3273, email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca)
Network Survey

Contact Information

Please fill in the following information. Again, only the name of your organization will be made part of the study and all personal information collected from this survey will be used for follow up purposes only.

- Name:
- Position:
- Organization:
- *Province where your organization is located:
- Email:
- Phone number:
- Organization Website:

Where is your organization’s work focused (check all that apply and list areas where applicable):

- Neighbourhood
- Municipality
- Province
- National
- Global
- Other

Organizational Information

Please respond to the following questions on behalf of your organization.

1) What are the main goals of your organization?

Goal #1:
Goal #2:
Goal #3:
Goal #4:
Goal #5:

2) What are the main activities your organization is involved in? (please list)

Activity #1:
Activity #2:
Activity #3:
Activity #4:
Activity #5:
3) How strongly does your organization identify with the following values:

[1=very strong; 2=strong; 3=weak; 4=very weak; 5= not at all]

a) social justice 1 2 3 4 5 don’t’ know
b) ecological sustainability 1 2 3 4 5 don’t’ know
c) community health 1 2 3 4 5 don’t’ know
d) democratic participation 1 2 3 4 5 don’t’ know
e) Other (please specify):
_________________________ 1 2 3 4 5 don’t’ know

4) What issues does your organization identify with?

[1=very strong; 2=strong; 3=weak; 4=very weak; 5= not at all]

a) academic/research 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
b) agritourism 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
c) anti-hunger 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
d) anti-poverty 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
e) charity 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
f) community development 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
g) community health 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
h) consumer choice 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
i) environmental 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
j) farm workers’ rights 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
k) farming/agriculture 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
l) fishing 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
m) food distribution and marketing 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
n) food literacy/education 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
o) food safety 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
p) food security 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
q) food sovereignty 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
r) labeling and certification 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
s) regional/global trade 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
t) other (please specify):
_________________________ 1 2 3 4 5 don’t know
5) Do you consider your organization to be part of the food movement?

Yes/No

 Networking Part 1

Please respond to the following questions regarding your organization’s contact with others.

6) What is the strength of your relationship with [the provincial network organization]?

Relationship Quality: 1=Very Strong, 2=Strong, 3=Moderate, 4=Weak, 5=Very Weak, 6=don’t know

7) To what extent has your organization linked to [the provincial network organization] in the past year?

a) Shared info or advice  
   e.g. regular calls, working groups, meetings or emails  
   Regularly Often Rarely Never  
   don’t know

b) Formally shared resources/projects  
   e.g. joint funding or applications, joint projects, shared equipment or personnel, shared facilities, etc.  
   Regularly Often Rarely Never  
   don’t know

c) Joint action or support  
   e.g. providing letters of support, cross promotion of resources or campaigns, acting together informally  
   Regularly Often Rarely Never  
   don’t know

d) Referrals received or given  
   e.g. suggestions that their/your members, clients or the public contact or work with the other organization  
   Regularly Often Rarely Never  
   don’t know

e) Other (please specify):  
   ________________________________  
   Regularly Often Rarely Never  
   don’t know
**Networking Part 2**

8) In each of the following categories, please list the 3 organizations or groups (e.g. non-profit, government or private) you are involved with most frequently and that you believe are valuable to your organization in helping address food issues.

Please list the name of the organization, what was exchanged (e.g. information, resources, joint action or support, referrals given or received, etc.), and how you would rate the overall relationship strength (1=very strong to 5=very weak)

| Locally | 1) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | 2) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 3) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | **Provincially** |
|         | 1) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 2) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 3) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | **Canada** |
|         | 1) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 2) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 3) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | **Globally** |
|         | 1) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 2) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
|         | 3) Name of Organization:  
What is the nature of the relationship (i.e. what was exchanged)?:  
Relationship Strength: (very strong) | 2 3 4 5(very weak) |
9) Reflecting on your responses from the previous question, for each institutional sector that you have been in contact with in the past year, please indicate the extent to which you have been in contact with them.

a) Non-Profit Sector (e.g. other organizations)  Regularly Often  Rarely never don’t know
b) Private Sector (e.g. business, media)  Regularly Often  Rarely never don’t know
c) Federal Government  Regularly Often  Rarely never don’t know
d) Provincial Government  Regularly Often  Rarely never don’t know
e) Municipal Government  Regularly Often  Rarely never don’t know

Networking Part 3

Please reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of collaborating with other organizations or groups.

10) What benefits have come to your organization from collaborating with other organizations or groups (e.g. non-profit, government or private)?

[1=has happened to a large degree; 2=has happened to some degree; 3=has not happened]

a) Able to serve our mission or members better  1  2  3  don’t know
b) Acquisition of additional funding or other resources  1  2  3  don’t know
c) Acquisition of new knowledge or skills  1  2  3  don’t know
d) Built new relationships that are helpful to our organization  1  2  3  don’t know
e) Heightened public awareness or profile of our organization  1  2  3  don’t know
f) Enhanced influence in the community  1  2  3  don’t know
g) Other benefits (Please indicate):  1  2  3  don’t know

11) What drawbacks has your organization experienced from collaborating with other organizations or groups (e.g. non-profit, government or private)?

[1=has happened to a large degree; 2=has happened to some degree; 3=has not happened]

a) Takes too much time and resources  1  2  3  don’t know
b) Loss of control/autonomy over decisions  1  2  3  don’t know
c) Strained relations with partners  1  2  3  don’t know
d) Strained relations within my organization  1  2  3  don’t know
e) Not enough credit given to my organization  1  2  3  don’t know
e) Other drawbacks? (Please indicate):

___________________________________ 1 2 3 don’t know

**Final Comments**

12) What more could *the provincial network organization* be doing to support your work?

13) Is there anything else you would like to add?

**If you have questions or concerns, please let us know by contacting:**

Charles Z Levkoe, PhD Candidate, Department of Geography and Program in Planning, University of Toronto, email: charles.levkoe@utoronto.ca; or

Sarah Wakefield, Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Program in Planning, University of Toronto, 100 St. George Street, Toronto, ON M5S 3G3, tel: 416-978-3653, email: sarah.wakefield@utoronto.ca.

If you have any concerns about this research or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the *Office of Research Ethics* at the University of Toronto (tel: 416-946-3273, email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca)
## Appendix B
### Interview Guides

**Interview Guide for Provincial Network Organizations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Probe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Personal Motivations and Perspectives | • How did you become involved in community food security work? | • Motivations?  
• Influences? |
|                              | In your personal view, what are the best solutions to the challenges we face in the current food system? | • Most pressing problems in food system?  
• How should food be grown, processed, distributed, consumed and disposed of?  
• Transformation vs reform?  
• Main actors: Role of the state, market, civil society?  
“Ideal” vs “realistic” solutions? Why? What? |
| Organizational Approach | • What are the primary solutions to challenges in the current food system on which your organization is working? | • Specific approaches?  
• Specific projects?  
• Why these?  
• Part of a palette of solutions or the thing that needs to be done? |
|                              | What have been the effects of your organization’s work both inside and outside your organization? | • Positive effects or accomplishments?  
Obstacles? |
| Provincial Specificity | • What is unique about your province in respect to the food system? | • Geographical?  
• Historical? |
| Transformative Food Politics | • Does your organization have a position on social justice in the food system? | • What or why not?  
• Why important? |
|                              | Does your organization have a position on ecological sustainability in the food system? | • Components or why not?  
Why important? |
|                              | Does your organization have a position on Community Health in the food system? | • Components or why not?  
Why important? |
|                              | Does your organization have a position on democratic inclusion in the | • Components or why not?  
Why important? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food System?</th>
<th>Does your organization talk about and/or implement a whole systems perspective?</th>
<th>- How? production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your organization talk about and implement collective solutions (beyond market-based solutions)?</td>
<td>- How? moving beyond individual market-based solutions towards ones that embed food within meaningful cultural and community relations while improving access to good, healthy food for all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your organization talk about and implement local initiatives in connection to other local organizations/ideas?</td>
<td>- How? developing solidarities across scale while maintaining specific characteristics and diversities developed in place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Movement</th>
<th>• Do you consider your organization part of a food movement?</th>
<th>• Why or why not? • Canadian food movement? • Global food movement? • relations? • What kind of relationship?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provincial Network</th>
<th>• How is your organization making connections in the region?</th>
<th>• Processes? • Structure?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What kinds of connections have been made in the region? (show sample findings from the survey)</td>
<td>• Province? • Canada? • Internationally? • Purpose? • Strength? Frequency?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has the provincial network supported the work of local actors?</td>
<td>• How has food related work in the region changed since the establishment of your organization? • Benefits of the network? • Drawbacks of the network? Recommendations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interview Guide for Alternative Food Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Probe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Motivations and Perspectives</strong></td>
<td>• How did you become involved in community food security work?</td>
<td>• Motivations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Influences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your personal view, what are the best solutions to the challenges we face in the current food system?</td>
<td>• Most pressing problems in food system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How should food be grown, processed, distributed, consumed and disposed of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transformation vs reform?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Main actors: Role of the state, market, civil society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Ideal” vs “realistic” solutions? Why? What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Approach</strong></td>
<td>• What are the primary solutions to challenges in the current food system on which your organization is working?</td>
<td>• Specific approaches?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Specific projects?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Why these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Part of a palette of solutions or the thing that needs to be done?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What have been the effects of your organization’s work both inside and outside your organization?</td>
<td>• Positive effects or accomplishments? Obstacles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial Specificity</strong></td>
<td>• What is unique about your province in respect to the food system?</td>
<td>• Geographical?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Historical?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformative Food Politics</strong></td>
<td>• Does your organization have a position on social justice in the food system?</td>
<td>• What or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Why important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your organization have a position on ecological sustainability in the food system?</td>
<td>• Components or why not? Why important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your organization have a position on community health in the food system?</td>
<td>• Components or why not? Why important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your organization have a position on democratic inclusion in the food system?</td>
<td>• Components or why not? Why important?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Food Movement

**• How would you describe the food movement?**
- Canada?
- Globally?
- Relations?
- Your region compared to others?
- Why do these differences exist?
- Regional differentiation as strength or weakness?
- Effective?
- Increase effectiveness?

**What role does your organization (if any) play in the movement?**
- Part of the food movement?
  - Why or why not?

### Provincial Network

**• What are your connections to other community food security organizations?**
(show sample findings from the survey)
- How (region and beyond)?
- Province?
- Canada?
- Internationally?
- Strength?
- Frequency?
- Purpose?

**What is your connection to the provincial network organization?**
- Process?
- Strength?
- Frequency?
- Purpose?

**How has the provincial network supported your organization’s work?**
- How has food related work in the region changed since the establishment of the provincial network organization?
- What role do these connections play in supporting the expansion of their...
reach and in addressing structural concerns within the food system?
• Benefits?
• Constraints?
Recommendations?
Appendix C
Popular Education Workshop Descriptions

British Columbia Food Systems Network
July 7 – 10, 2011
Towards a Transformative Food Politics
This interactive workshop will explore the increasing diversity of food initiatives that have emerged to challenge the corporate led industrial food system. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with practical and theoretical ideas of what a transformative orientation for the emerging food movement looks like. Similar sessions are being held in Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia and discussions will contribute to strategic planning among the growing provincial and national food movement.

(Manitoba) Growing Local 2011 Conference
February 24-26, 2011
Towards a Transformative Food Politics
Be a part of this interactive session that will explore the increasing diversity of food initiatives that have emerged to challenge the corporate led industrial food system. Similar sessions are being held in BC, ON and NS and discussions will contribute to strategic planning among the growing provincial and national food movement.

(Ontario) Bring Food Home
October 27-29, 2011
Towards a Transformative Food Politics
This interactive workshop will explore ideas of food system change and the diversity of food initiatives that have emerged to challenge the industrial food system. Participants will have the opportunity to share their experience and engage with practical and theoretical ideas of what a transformative orientation for the emerging food movement looks and feels like. This workshop is part of a series of similar sessions being held in British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. The dialogue will contribute to strategic planning among regional, provincial and national food movement actors.

(Nova Scotia) The Nova Scotia Food Gathering
May 10, 2013
Towards a Transformative Food Politics
This interactive, popular education workshop will explore the diversity of food initiatives that have emerged to challenge the dominant food system. Participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences and engage with practical and theoretical ideas of what a transformative orientation for the emerging food movement looks and feels like. This workshop is part of a series of similar sessions being held in British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario. The dialogue will contribute to strategic planning efforts among regional, provincial and national food networks.
Appendix D
Popular Education Workshop

**Workshop Goal:**
1) To explore participants’ understanding and articulation of a transformative food politics and to reflect on the current work and strategies of local/regional/national/global organizations.
2) To contribute energy to the food movement

**Workshop Objectives:**
1) To document participant knowledge and experiences for the purposes of the research; 2) To share knowledge, experience and ideas among participants; and
3) To share participant knowledge, experience and ideas with the provincial network organization to support strategic planning
4) To build enthusiasm and facilitate deeper critical curiosity among participants

**Workshop Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME (min)</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS</th>
<th>STUFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|            | room preparation | Set-up | • Write agenda on a sheet of flip chart paper  
• Place consent letter and contact sign up sheet on a table  
• Place markers and stickie notes on a table or distribute them around the room  
• Mount famous food quotes posters around the room | Agenda on F/C  
Many Markers  
Stickie Notes (colours)  
Food Quotes Posters  
Contact Sign Up Sheet  
Consent Letter |
|            | welcome early arrivals | Quotes | • Welcome early arrivers by asking them to circulate around the room and read some of the quotes mounted and to think about which they most identify with  
• Fill in name tags (optional) | Name Tags (optional) |
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 10 | To convene and focus the group in a welcoming manner  
To ensure consent is understood and given by all participants | Welcome and Consent |  
*See Activity 1*  
- Welcome the group and announce that the session is beginning and introduce yourself  
- Explain details about informed consent |
| 5 | To orient participants to process and reasoning behind the workshop | Framing the Workshop |  
*See Activity 2*  
- Introduce goals, objectives and concept of workshop  
Community Food Security and Transformative Food Politics Definition on F/C |
| 5 | To orient people to the process of the session  
To establish positive group behaviours | Agenda / Respect |  
*See Activity 3*  
- Review agenda for everyone  
Agenda on F/C “Guidelines” on F/C |
| 20 | To share collective knowledge about how lack of CFS affects us all, and to recognize that there is already strong knowledge and information in the group. | What’s Happening Chart: What Decreases Community Food Security |  
*See Activity 4*  
- Explain that this activity allows us to share collective knowledge about how a lack of CFS affects us all, and to recognize that there is already strong knowledge and information in the group  
- Briefly define Chart categories (social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democracy)  
WHC on Wall WHC Handout Stickies Markers |
| 15 | Contextualize workshop by telling people about the Transformative Food Politics Framework | Overview of A Transformative Food Politics |  
*See Activity 5*  
- Share the critiques of current food initiatives and explain the three elements for adopting a transformative food politics  
Transformative Food Politics Definition on F/C |
| 15 | To share collective knowledge about how we can increase CFS | **What’s Happening**  
**Chart: What Increases Community Food Security** | • See Activity 6  
• Explain that we will share collective ideas about how we can increase CFS. Refer people to the chart we used in the previous activity  
• Either ask pairs to form and each write one sticky note that can be placed somewhere on the chart or  
• Conduct this activity in plenary by asking people to suggest what could go on the chart – facilitator can fill out sticky notes as people make suggestions  
| Stickies Markets |

| 5 | To bring closure to the workshop, evaluate the process and tie up any loose ends | **Evaluation and Wrap up** | • See Activity 7  
• State that we are at the end of the session- all that’s left is wrapping up and evaluating  
• Ask people to wrap-up by pointing out one action or next step that they feel is a priority – either something they would do themselves or that they would strongly recommend (to the RNO, a non-profit organization, or government)  
• Ask one or two people to fill out detailed evaluation forms in the coming week to provide evaluation for future workshops  
• Explain that all write-ups will be sent around to participants in the coming weeks if they choose to leave their e-mail addresses and that results may also appear in RNO newsletters and conference proceedings  
| Evaluation Forms |
ACTIVITY 1 WELCOME AND CONSENT

Objective

- To convene and focus the group in a welcoming manner
- To ensure consent is understood and given by all participants

Time

10 minutes

What you need

- Name Tags (optional)
- Markers
- Agenda on Flip Chart Paper
- Consent Letter

What to do

1. Welcome the group and announce that the session is beginning and introduce yourself
2. Point out agenda and say that we will be looking more closely at it shortly
3. Ensure all participants understand and give consent to participate. Make sure everyone has a copy of the ethics letter and highlight the main points:
   - This workshop is part of collaborative research between the University of Toronto and [the provincial network organization]
   - All information discussed and documented during the workshop will remain anonymous
   - Information that comes from the workshop will be included in reports and articles
   - If contact information is provided, a summary of the information collected at the workshop will be sent to you by e-mail if you choose to leave your contact information
   - Information may appear in conference proceedings and will be shared with [the provincial network organization] and other organizations to support future work
   - You can leave this workshop at any time, or choose to participate in any activities as much or as little as you wish
   - Please feel free to ask questions or express any concerns

Before moving on ask if anyone has any questions at this time
4. (Omit depending on numbers) Do a quick go-around for everyone to introduce themselves

Note: Make it clear that people have the choice to not say their name and organization

- Ask people their name, where they are from and organization
- Ask people to feature one quote that they connected with as a way of introducing themselves
ACTIVITY 2  FRAMING THE WORKSHOP

Objective
- To orient participants to process and reasoning behind the workshop

Time 5 minutes

What you need
- Community Food Security Definition Posted on Flip Chart Paper
- Transformative Food Politics Definition Posted on Flip Chart Paper

What to do
1. Introduce the goals, objectives and concept of this workshop:
   a. We want to talk about what a transformative food politics look like
   b. We want to talk about what CFS looks like in your community and what more can be done
   c. We will document our knowledge and experiences in this work for a cross Canada analysis and reflection
   d. We will share our knowledge, experience and ideas among each other
   e. We will share our knowledge, experience and ideas with the [RNO] to support strategic planning
   f. What the workshop is not (use if there is a large number of participants): our time is short and in order to share the time well, this participatory process will make lengthy contributions difficult. So, if you have more to say than a particular step permits, please consider writing something that you can contribute during or after the process

2. Define Community Food Security (and post)

   The concept of community food security was developed by theorists and practitioners in the early 1990s as a theoretical and practical approach, and an attempt to create broad-based and systemic approaches to reconnect food production and consumption and ensure an adequate and accessible food supply. Organizations and initiatives using a CFS perspective attempted to build a more comprehensive approach to food security by integrating anti-poverty, ecological concerns and community health. The concept of CFS has evolved over time, but is now generally defined as “a situation 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.” The focus of CFS advocates is on community self-reliance, and the goal is to develop a community-based food system grounded in regional ecological production and local decision-making.

3. Define Transformative Food Politics (and post) and note that this will be discussed in more detail later
A transformative food politic refers to a collection of initiatives that attempt to address the root causes of current challenges within the food system, rather than just the symptoms. A transformative food politics demands a comprehensive approach to food system problems.
ACTIVITY 3  AGENDA / RESPECT

Objective
- to orient people to the process of the session
- to establish positive group behaviours

Time  5 minutes

What you need
  Agenda on Flip Chart Paper
  Basic “Guidelines” (see below) on Flip Chart Paper

What to do
1. Review the agenda
2. Introduce the following basic ‘guidelines’ for participation:
   a. speak for yourself; don’t volunteer other people to speak.
   b. share the available time
   c. turn off cell phones and pagers during the meeting.
   d. don’t interrupt when someone else is speaking
ACTIVITY 4 WHAT’S HAPPENING CHART: WHAT DECREASES COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY?

Objective
To share collective knowledge about how lack of CFS affects us all, and to recognize that there is already strong knowledge and information in the group.

Time 20 minutes

What you need
- Large What’s Happening Chart on Wall
- Markers
- Sticky notes – one colour
- What’s Happening Chart Handout

What to do
1. Explain:

   This activity is a generative one – it will help us to generate knowledge and is not necessarily about consensus. Contradictions are good to bring out because they allow us to examine them and have a dialogue. This exercise allows us to share collective knowledge about how a lack of CFS affects us all, and to recognize that there is already strong knowledge and information in the group.

2. Introduce the What’s Happening Chart.

   This chart represents a way to understand how a lack of CFS is affecting our communities. The chart has four areas (plus one “other”) that impact as well as looking at three different levels where people are affected.

   - Social justice refers to power and material in/equity through physical and economic accessibility to sufficient amounts of food along with the circumstances and conditions of those who produce food. E.G. increasing poverty and hunger; dangerous and difficult conditions of farmers and farm workers; the unequal impact of these and other challenges on women.

   - Ecological sustainability refers to the connection between human and ecological systems E.G. large-scale monoculture farming, heavy reliance on fossil fuels (used in fertilizers and pesticides as well as transport), and industrial livestock contributing to water, soil and air pollution, climate change and a loss of biodiversity.

   - Community health refers to regional capacity to produce and distribute adequate nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable foods E.G. our “energy dense, nutrient poor” diet contributes to a global obesity epidemic and diet related diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, type-2 diabetes, and nutritional deficiencies have become more prevalent than ever.

   - Democracy refers to process in/equity and agency through increasing public participation in decision making and system-wide control E.G.
Increasing corporate control within the food system has left limited space for democratic participation, alienating people from the production and consumption of food increasing commodification and relegating decision-making to market processes.

3. Explain the purpose (objective) of the chart, and how to do it.

Basically we are making a picture of how CFS impacts communities. Divide into four groups – one group for each column – and, using sticky notes, think about and share examples of things that have made it harder to establish CFS. These could be events and trends, which you have experienced or witnessed (perhaps to a friend or an issue your organization works with), or something you’ve seen on the news. The four areas (columns) are ways to look at the different issues within the food system and they are a way to think about how CFS affects various aspects of our life. If you think of something that doesn’t seem to fit, you can either choose the “Other” column or simply make your best guess about where it belongs.

4. Post an example in each column to get things started

Social Justice

-Farm Income Crisis - the increasing gap between gross farm income and realized net farm income while corporate profits are at record numbers

-National Farmers Union – economic and social policies that will maintain the family farm as the primary food-producing unit in Canada

-Challenges of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and the Low Skilled Workers Program

-Justice for migrant workers – right of farm workers farm workers without status

Ecological Sustainability

-Difficulties associated with entry for new farmers (access to land, skill, knowledge, experience)

-FarmStart – supporting and encouraging new generation of farmers to develop **locally based, ecologically sound and economically viable agricultural enterprises**

-Farmers survival based on industrial methods (scale, cash crops, monoculture)

-Alternative Land Use Services (Norfolk) – pay farmers for (preserving and restoring) ecological goods and services
Community Health

-Good Food Gap – policy space separating the farm income crisis from the health crisis — in other words, the fact that farmers find it difficult to make a living growing food, and consumers find it difficult to make the good food choices they want to make

-Community Shared Agriculture projects - encourages urban and rural residents to share responsibility for the way their food is grown and how it is produced.

-Farmers’ Markets - direct sales at markets operate independently, differing in size, style and requirements, but share a focus on supporting sustainable agriculture and building strong communities

Democracy

-lack of skill and opportunity to participate

-Food Policy Council - partners with business and community groups to develop policies and programs promoting food security

-Cooperatives – people have a direct say on how things work

5. Divide participants into four groups – one for each column. Assign each group a column and for 5 minutes ask them to fill in as many sticky notes as they can for their column and the five rows. Before asking everyone to post their stickies, give everyone one minute to add to any of the columns. If something comes up that does not fit in one of the first four columns, suggest that participants use the “Other” column.

6. Everyone posts their contributions and then everyone can have a look at the chart as they finish posting. (You can call this a “Museum tour” – people come up and look closely at the chart the way people stroll by paintings in an art gallery).

7. Read out a selection of the sticky note contributions to give everyone a quick sense of what’s on the chart. While reading, if the facilitator notices any patterns (e.g. the same thing repeated or, perhaps notable missing pieces) these observations could be shared.

8. Participants are then asked add any patterns or issues about what they observed. Allow only a few minutes. Start by asking for a few people to volunteer to explain one of the things that they posted. After a few have volunteered this information you can then ask if anyone wants to ask a question about something that they’ve seen. Finally, as a way of ending this step ask everyone if there’s anything that’s missing. It could be something we’ve simply forgotten, or it could be something that we think is so obvious it doesn’t need mentioning; it could also be something that is not there because the person or persons who might post it are not present. For example, if there
are no posts about democracy, why might that be? You could ask everyone to take a moment to think about who is not present and to think of one thing that they could add to represent those who are absent.

9. The chart should look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOCIAL JUSTICE</th>
<th>ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY</th>
<th>COMMUNITY HEALTH</th>
<th>DEMOCRACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GLOBALLY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONALLY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCALLY/PROVINCIALY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

It is not necessary for every person to put something in every box. You may want to stress this point telling people to fill in what they know. The point of the exercise is to see what we know collectively and what’s missing as well. In this way we can either dig for more information (that we have simply forgotten) or decide to go and learn more.
ACTIVITY 5  OVERVIEW OF A TRANSFORMATIVE FOOD POLITICS

Objective

Share the critiques of current food initiatives and explain the three elements for adopting a transformative food politics

Time  15 minutes

What you need

Flipchart with Main Points

What to do

1. Tell participants that now that we have spoken about what limits to CFS look like and we need to also imagine a world where CFS exists.

Explain the Transformative Food Politics Framework

A transformative food politics refers to a collection of initiatives that attempt to address the root causes of current challenges within the food system, rather than just the symptoms. This encompasses strategies and activities that move beyond making slight changes to the current food system towards a reconceptualization of both the root of current dilemmas and of the solutions that will address them. A transformative food politics demands a comprehensive approach to food system problems; it works towards the institutionalization of alternative food discourse in both policy and practice, and it necessitates the development of interrelated solutions that simultaneously consider and address social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democracy in a comprehensive and contextualized way. Moving beyond isolated acts of resistance and reform, a transformative food politics (re)builds social, economic and political infrastructure through creativity, experimentation, concrete actions and feasible projects that provide inspiration for ways that a different kind of food system could function. Instead of simply lamenting the effects of existing systems, or pointing to an end goal of the kind of system we desire, a transformative food politics focuses on the governance mechanisms and processes of food system transformation.

Elements:

1) Transition to collective subjectivities - responds to the critique that AFIIs are complicit in producing and reproducing neoliberal ideals through the creation of consumer subjects. Collective subjectivities begin with individuals but include maintaining sensitivity to difference and the identification of common interests and collective benefits. It refocuses analysis from the individual towards the collective as the primary agent of change. With respect to food, it is a shift away from acting strictly as a consumer, to having agency – and responsibility – beyond purchasing power.

2) Whole system approach - responds to the critique that AFI programming tends to focus on isolated food issues while ignoring the interconnected nature of problems within the dominant food system. A whole food system approach can be described as a comprehensive perspective that integrates social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democracy throughout all aspects of the food system from production to processing to distribution to consumption to waste management.
3) Politics of reflexive localization - responds to critiques that AFIs idealize ideas of “local,” thereby assuming that local foods have an innate association with positive attributes. Reflexive localization refers to transcending a static interpretation of the meaning of local (i.e. make connections across localities) while simultaneously preserving and maintaining unique characteristics and diversities developed in place.
ACTIVITY 6 WHAT’S HAPPENING CHART: WHAT’S NEEDED TO INCREASE COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY?

Objective
To share collective knowledge about how we can increase CFS

Time 15 minutes

What you need
- The Same Large What’s Happening Chart on the Wall
- Markers
- Sticky Notes – Different Colour
- What’s Happening Chart Handout

What to do
1. Explain that we will share collective ideas about how we can increase CFS. Refer people to the chart we used in the previous activity. Point out that it is on the wall and in their handouts.

   The first time we used this chart we looked at things that are making it harder to build CFS. Now we will focus on increasing CFS:
   - What are people doing in your communities and what are people doing in Ontario, in Canada and around the world to build CFS (from the grassroots to governments)?

2. Form pairs or groups of three.
3. Write on the different coloured sticky notes than the ones that are already on the chart and post them where the group can see them.
4. Allow 5 minutes. Ask participants to post responses to the chart and spend 5 minutes reading what others have posted.
5. The facilitator should read out a sampling of the sticky notes.
6. Discuss what is posted – solicit questions or comments on what is written, how we could bring about these alternatives, and so on.
7. To close this exercise, ask what, if anything, is missing and why.
ACTIVITY 7 EVALUATION / WRAP-UP / NEXT STEPS

Objective  
To bring closure to the workshop, evaluate the process and discuss next steps.

Time  5 minutes

What to do  
1. State that we are at the end of the session - all that’s left is wrapping up and evaluating.
2. Ask people to wrap-up by pointing out one action or next step that they feel is a priority – either something they would do themselves or that they would strongly recommend (to the RNO, a non-profit organization, or government)
3. Explain that all write-ups will be sent around to participants in the coming weeks if they choose to leave their e-mail addresses and that results may also appear in RNO newsletters and conference proceedings
4. Thank everyone for coming.
5. Gather all the stickie notes and flip charts so you can prepare a report