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Eating Cars: Food Citizenship in a “Community in Crisis”

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Article abstract

Guptill and Wilkins (2002) employ the concept of “food citizenship” to argue that engaging people more fully in decision-making about their own food systems encourages alliances between food producers and eaters and helps to build sustainable food environments. In this article my focus is on the development of community food citizenship, a phrase I use to draw attention to the dynamics of including all residents in the creation of new food systems. Focusing on a community’s diversity – to include, for example, residents who are economically marginalized and those who are economically privileged, as well as residents who are food activists and those who are not – highlights the pedagogical dimensions of initiating and building food citizenship in particular places. To sketch out some of the tensions in and possibilities for community food citizenship, I focus here on the case of Windsor, Ontario, a once thriving automotive centre now facing high unemployment rates and economic hardship. My relationship to this particular case study is as a participant in community efforts to develop an alternative food system and as a researcher/educator who is currently studying this process.

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EATING CARS: FOOD CITIZENSHIP IN A "COMMUNITY IN CRISIS"

Lynne PHILLIPS

RÉSUMÉ
Guptill et Wilkins (2002) s'appuient sur le concept de la « citoyenneté alimentaire » pour faire valoir que l'implication des personnes dans la prise de décision sur leurs propres systèmes d'approvisionnement alimentaire incite à la formation d'alliances entre les producteurs et consommateurs de denrées alimentaires et contribue à la création d'environnements alimentaires viables. Dans cet article, je m'intéresse au développement de la citoyenneté alimentaire communautaire, une notion à laquelle je me réfère afin d'attirer l'attention sur la dynamique qui vise à inclure tous les résidants dans la conception de nouveaux systèmes alimentaires. L'accent est mis sur la diversité communautaire qui se réfère, par exemple, aux résidents économiquement démunis et privilégiés, de même que les résidents qui défendent les droits alimentaires et ceux qui ne sont pas des militants. Cette perspective fait ressortir les dimensions pédagogiques liées à la mise en place et le renforcement de la citoyenneté alimentaire dans des lieux particuliers. Je présente une description sommaire des tensions que suscitent la citoyenneté alimentaire communautaire et les possibilités qui en résultent au moyen d'une étude de cas sur Windsor, Ontario, un ancien centre manufacturier de l'industrie automobile qui a déjà été prospère, mais qui fait face aujourd'hui à des taux de chômage élevés et de difficultés économiques. Les types de lien que j'entretiens avec la présente étude de cas sont d'abord comme participante dans les efforts communautaires visant à élaborer un système alimentaire alternatif et puis comme chercheure/éducatrice qui dirige présentement une étude de ce processus.

MOTS-CLÉS ▪ Alimentation locale, désindustrialisation, activisme alimentaire, engagement public

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ABSTRACT
Guptill and Wilkins (2002) employ the concept of "food citizenship" to argue that engaging people more fully in decision-making about their own food systems encourages alliances between food producers and eaters and helps to build sustainable food environments. In this article my focus is on the development of community food citizenship, a phrase I use to draw attention to the dynamics of including all residents in the creation of new food systems. Focusing on a community's diversity – to include, for example, residents who are economically marginalized and those who are economically privileged, as well as residents who are food activists and those who are not – highlights the pedagogical dimensions of initiating and building food citizenship in particular places. To sketch out some of the tensions in and possibilities for community food citizenship, I focus here on the case of Windsor, Ontario, a once thriving automotive centre now facing high unemployment rates and economic hardship. My relationship to this particular case study is as a participant in community efforts to develop an alternative food system and as a researcher/educator who is currently studying this process.

KEYWORDS ▪ Local food, de-industrialization, food activism, public engagement

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INTRODUCTION

My story begins in the classroom. In 2009 when I first taught a course on Food and Global Sustainability at the University of Windsor, my teaching assistant, Maya Ruggles (founder of the food gardening network Fed-Up Windsor), suggested the identification of "food deserts" as a beyond-the-classroom assignment for the course. Working in groups, students walked around specified areas of Windsor-Essex County (WEC) to determine the extent to which food deserts exist in the area. Drawing on the literature (Larsen and Gilliland 2008; Raja et al. 2008), we defined food deserts as areas where residents had to drive or walk more than 10-15 minutes to access fresh, affordable, healthy, and culturally desirable food. After identifying food deserts in the region, students designed "food charters" as a way to think about how the community could both decrease the identified vulnerabilities to food insecurity and inspire "food oases." These assignments were undertaken with the perspective that developing a more localized approach to food was good for: our health (eating fresh food with more nutrients); the environment (decreasing the distance and use of pesticides in food production); alleviating poverty (greater food availability locally and promoting "fair miles" for food producers elsewhere); and the community (collaborating for a common goal; food relationships are fun).

By the end of the course, a number of students decided to continue working on this theme, and FAWG – the Food Advisory Working Group – was born. FAWG, with two faculty members (Jamey Essex, a geographer, and me, an anthropologist), one community member (a "downsized" engineer), and a rotating roster of University of Windsor students or ex-students, is a local food advocacy group aimed at developing an alternative food system in WEC. Over the last two years, we have worked with the community to promote the idea of a food charter. Today, a wider range of people in the community are now talking about the importance of having a food charter to move toward a healthier, more localized food system. On the other hand, there remain important fault-lines in the community that have not been addressed, either by FAWG or by other food activists.[1]

Two brief examples of the latter will suffice here. Windsor City Council recently quashed a step toward local food security when councillors turned down the requests of community groups to consider a by-law change to permit urban hens (for eggs). The virulent rejection by Council of this proposal was made clear when it was discovered that one of the Councillors had brought in a "chicken expert" who turned out to be an egg industry consultant. The consultant argued, not surprisingly, that chickens were "complex" and residents did not know enough about them to be given permission to care for them on their own. Bringing such power to bear on what seemed at the time such a small request hinted at a much larger disagreement about how people should access their food. A second example arose in a recent forum on Food Charters organized by FAWG. During the forum, a disparity surfaced between those interested in food security for alleviating poverty in the community (connected to, for example, food banks) and those calling for major changes in how and where WEC food is produced and distributed. My reading of the forum is that the more service-oriented groups seemed frustrated to be dealing with issues already covered; if we wanted a Food Charter, why then did we not just draw one up and have people approve it? FAWG and other groups interested in organic food and alternative cultivation (Guerrilla Gardeners, University Community Garden, WECSA) were more interested in working "from the ground up," developing relationships and allies, and staying attuned to the *process* of how to come to agreement about the food we produce and eat.

These two examples suggest that the case of Windsor-Essex County (WEC) may offer useful lessons regarding the pedagogies and politics of achieving community food citizenship. To attend to these lessons, three main questions are posed here.[2] First, what are the specific challenges to and prospects for increasing localized food production and consumption? To address this question I investigate the cultural/economic dynamics of WEC, the impact of the current unemployment crisis and the tension in the different narratives regarding WEC's future. Second, what role can an advocacy group such as FAWG play in promoting a shift to local, healthy, sustainably produced food? This question permits consideration of some of the strengths and limitations of being a university-based group, and in particular

[1] Windsor-Essex County (WEC) includes the towns of Amherstburg, LaSalle, Essex, Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Kingsville, the Municipality of Leamington, the township of Pelee, and the City of Windsor. It should be noted that these towns have been subject to externally-imposed amalgamation efforts, influencing the degree to which they view themselves as a "community," a "fault-line" not investigated in this paper.

[2] My arguments are necessarily tentative and exploratory since the study is still in process. Most of the data here derive from select community documents, my observations as a community member since 1989, and my "activist knowledge" (Hale, 2007) through FAWG.

whether we might be subject to allegations of becoming the arbiters of "good food" in a largely working-class city. And, third, what food for thought does the WEC situation offer to those who do not live in the region? Here I outline some lessons for what is referred to as "public scholarship."[3] To foreground part of my argument, the food situation in WEC raises larger questions about collaborative research across difference and about the dilemmas faced by publicly-oriented academics in addressing the divergent – sometimes opposing – views within one community.

The awkwardness of this project is reflected in the phrase "eating cars." Of course, no one wants to eat cars. But thinking of "eating" as both an adjective and a verb, the metaphor encourages us to think about cars in broader terms: how their dependence on fossil fuels and production of air/water pollution can "eat" (destroy) the physical environment; how they can so dominate our lives that "eating" (and consumption in general) is virtually organized around them; and how the dominant role of cars in our lives may be challenged by the development of alternative eating practices. However, in Windsor – the "Automotive Capital of Canada" – employment, and to some extent "identity," rests on the production of cars. "Eating cars" thus provides a small window for analysing issues such as class, consumption and place.

1. PLACE, TASTE AND CLASS

Place is not simply a location in which we live or work: place is *made*. This distinction, thanks to Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]), helps to illuminate how artful practices can "work" spaces in order to *become* places. Place-making, in this context, is a political project (Prazniak and Dirlik, 2001). What is less often noted is that, if we are to recognize place as political work, and as something always in the making, we need to be prepared for the prospect that place-making may be undertaken by a wide range of actors, some with quite different "projects" in mind. For example, while different memories about the past and narratives about the future can play a critical role in place-making, narration as place-making does not necessarily take place on a level playing field. Blokland's (2009) research on rival interpretations of a neighbourhood in Connecticut reveals the importance of distinguishing what she calls place-making "agents" – often those with more resources for "doing" community – from more marginalized residents (in this case, those living in the Projects) who may actually be more dependent on the community but have little voice in dominant, public interpretations.[4] Her research shows that an analysis of place-making requires attention to claims and counter-claims about "community," though she does not indicate how an explicit politics of alternative place-making might benefit from this point.

With mounting evidence that neoliberal globalization can make, unmake and even erase the communities in which people live and work, place has (again) become a matter of concern, for citizens, municipal governments and academics alike.[5] Critical analyses of the processes of displacement and de- and re-territorialization point to links between the capacity of capital to feed off of the abstract concept of "global" as a means for producing wealth and the realignment and expansion of corporate-friendly communities – with far-reaching consequences for everyday life (Braedley and Luxton, 2010; Burawoy, 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff, 200; Sassen, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999). It is within this context that place-based movements and the struggle for alternative communities have emerged to challenge the modes of living proposed by corporate visions and practices (Escobar, 2001; Harcourt and Escobar, 2005; Prazniak and Dirlik, 2001).

The role of food in place-making is of course not new, but its transformative potential is of increasing interest to new food movements, such as *La Vía Campesina* and the locavore and *Slow Food* movements (Desmarais, 2007; Parkins and Craig, 2006; Petrini, 2004; Smith and MacKinnon, 2007; Wekerle, 2004). Food has long been a marker of things other than nutrition: food can speak equally to relationships of class and ethnicity in particular locales as it can to nation-building and global projects (Caldwell, 2002; Caplan, 1994; Diner, 2001; Mintz, 1985). As a marker of difference – among people and places – food as *cuisine* has been, and continues to be, a significant class indicator (Appadurai, 1988; Bourdieu, 1984; Goody, 1996). A decided focus on *taste* and luxury foods/drink reveals an intriguing reproduction of class bias in the current literature on food and place-making (Johnston and Bauman, 2007; Meneley, 2004; Paxson, 2010;

[3] Public scholarship demands research engagement with "the public" beyond simply publishing research results (see Burawoy et al., 2005; Cox, 2009; Hale 2007, 2008; Rappaport, 2005, 2007). For a theoretical framework for understanding publics and public engagement by social scientists, see Phillips and Cole (forthcoming).

[4] Blokland (2009) views narratives *as* place-making because they position and set boundaries to what and who constitutes a community (2009; see also Massey, 1994). She calls for research into the social and economic consequences of place-making narratives, particularly for those absent from them.

[5] Interest in the concept of place and space has historically waxed and waned; for a review, see Phillips (2010).

Smart, 2004; Trubek and Bowen, 2008). *Terroir*, translated as the "taste of place" (and Americanized as "somewhereness"), usefully captures the ecological and cultural dimensions of food as place-making, as it refers to food (and drink) quality deriving not just from the land and climate but from human know-how and care of crops and animals (Paxson, 2010; Trubek, 2008). Trubek and Bowen (2008) view the affective belonging implied by *terroir* as that which distinguishes artisan production from industrial production, the latter inferred to be, in contrast, a kind of "nowhereness" production.[6]

Interestingly, consumers who cannot afford to purchase foods produced through "somewhereness" are largely located in an entirely different literature: the literature on poverty and food banks. The starting point of this literature is seldom quality (and virtually never "taste") but quantity, or rather the lack of it. This shift in how food is discussed for people living in poverty is noteworthy, especially in light of the frequent criticism of food bank food by those who use them.[7] Moreover, it erases any cultural dimensions to food for low-income people. Assumptions about what kind of food low-income people might desire are largely based on the middle class assumptions of food donors rather than on the preferences of food bank users themselves. Rock et al. (2009) handily reveal these assumptions in the case of Kraft© dinner.

Drawing on the UN Declaration signed by Canada, anti-poverty activists rightly argue that all Canadians have a "right" to food. However, within this right, it is important to consider the implications of the discursive shift from "tasty" food for middle-class consumers who can afford it to "enough" food for working class or poor people who cannot.[8] Is this another way of saying that taste does not matter to the working class or to people living in poverty? Does it mean that they have no taste? Is this a hidden cultural dynamic operating in food projects in highly diverse communities such as the one in which I am involved in Windsor?

In referring to the "taste" of the working class, I am *not* arguing for the culinary rescue of so-called working class food, as discussed by Johnston and Bauman (2007) which, as their work shows, is only another way of generating status and elitism. What I am pointing to is the need to explore more carefully what good food means to low-income people and the associations they make between food and the places in which they live. In cities deeply marked by a corporate presence, as is the case in Windsor,[9] how do residents talk about good food? Does the corporate environment (and its relative "nowhereness") shape taste? Do the narratives of residents about their community's future implicate their taste in food? How does ethnicity/race figure, given WEC's extensive ethnic diversity? Although we currently have no answers to these important questions, they remain crucial in order to understand how the views of residents on what constitutes good food may shape their responses to current efforts to provide more "fresh and tasty" food for the community. This view challenges the idea that fresh and tasty food suggests the same thing to everyone. It questions whether the prospect of gardening – manual labour to produce food – means the same to someone who does manual labour for a living. It reveals how claims of the need for more "good food" by FAWG university students – usually thought not to be working class (though, clearly, they may be) – might signal to a working class community a kind of "civilizing" process at work (Elias, 1983), and therefore something quietly to resist. All of these points complicate the role of food activism – and, thus, the work of an advocacy group such as FAWG – in an economically and ethnically diverse community.

Zukin (2011) argues that "[t]he less diversified a local economy, the less likely it is that local people will unite around an alternative scenario for future growth." In line with this point, a more complete profile of Windsor Essex County remains to be discussed. It might be assumed, for example, that the

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[6] This is not to say that corporations do not make concessions to place. In challenging Ritzer's (1993) MacDonaldization thesis, Lozada (2000), Watson (2006) and others have demonstrated the bending (or "localization") of food chain corporations to accommodate the consumption expectations of particular places. In studies of *workers* in multinational corporations, however, it is clear that the corporate strategy is to erode practices which have historically constituted the work-*place* – thus: "minimizing long-term commitments and investments, maintaining labour as a variable cost, and enhancing the flexibility of the firm at the expense of workers' security" (Collins, 2005: 251).

[7] See Tom Lucier's blog on 'Do the Math Food Challenge' for a poignant description of living on food bank food in Windsor.

[8] This is not meant as a criticism of the important work of anti-poverty groups or those people working with food banks. One reason we encounter this approach may be because of the devastating effects of neoliberal policies on ideas about social support: in contrast to the discourse of the past, today people are not necessarily entitled to food at all.

[9] To give just a few examples, in car manufacturing: Ford, Chrysler and, until recently, GM; in agricultural production: Cargill, Sygenta, Green Giant, Heinz; and in supermarkets: Loblaws (i.e., Zehrs, No Frills and Real Canadian Superstore), Metro (and Food Basics), Sobey's (and Price Chopper), Walmart and, most recently (and oddly), Shoppers Drug Mart.

strong corporate presence in Windsor – despite its diversity – prevents the growth of other place-making projects. Though there is some truth to this argument, in the next section I discuss how the economic downturn has played a role in opening debate about "alternative scenarios" for developing the region's future.

2. WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY AS 'PLACE'

Windsor was described to me as a "lunch bucket town" – unable to sustain "good" restaurants – when I first arrived over 20 years ago. Today, independent restaurants remain relatively few and fast food chains dominate.[10] One of my commuting colleagues at the University claims that "there isn't even a decent place to get a cup of coffee." There are, of course, places to get a decent cup of coffee, but the comment symbolically sustains a dominant narrative regarding Windsor's working class character. Windsor is a "union town" and – despite a now downsized industrial labour force – there remains a strong affection for the automobile. In stark contrast to cities where pedestrians can expect cars to stop for them, cars in Windsor (and mini-vans and trucks) rule. Union bumper stickers exhort consumers not to buy "foreign" (meaning: cars) if they want to keep their jobs. The public transportation system remains poor throughout WEC, and securing bike lanes and trails for non-motorized vehicles has been an uphill battle. Given the lack of food availability in neighbourhoods (and, as my students identified, the preponderance of food deserts), it appears that most Windsor residents drive to undertake their grocery shopping.

Since the early 1990s, Windsor's economy has improved and crashed again. Today it is more likely to be referred to as the "Unemployment Capital" (rather than the historic "Automotive Capital") of Canada. With estimated unemployment rates greater than 10% (Statistics Canada, 2012), Windsor currently has the highest unemployment rate in the country.[11] According to the United Way's *Well-being Report* for WEC, there has been a 30% increase in Ontario Works income assistance, and food bank usage increased by 242% between 2006 and 2009 (United Way, 2010b).[12] Rental housing for families on Ontario Works allowances remains expensive (Food For Change, 2009: 11). In these kinds of circumstances, residents cut back on their food budget to secure necessities such as housing (Speaking of Poverty, 2011).[13] An often-repeated anecdote in the WEC community is that people who once donated food to banks now find themselves having to depend on them to make ends meet.

The narrative that dominates the region today is that WEC has become "a community in crisis" (Food for Change, 2009: 6; see also Bascaramurty, 2012), though economic recovery claims are consistently made by politicians. Yet as is sometimes the case, "crises" can also offer opportunities. In this context, the "crisis" has made possible a de-centring of automobile production (and manufacturing in general) in public discourse, leaving space to make new claims about place. It is interesting, for example, that virtually everyone, including the municipal government, now seems to agree that Windsor needs to diversify its economic base. However, what economic diversification means to different community members varies significantly. Windsor City Council and Windsor Essex Development Corporation (WEDC) regard the community's future almost exclusively in terms of attracting new corporate investment to the region, with a narrative emphasis on "growing business" and "cultivating a positive and diverse economic environment for business growth" (City of Windsor, 2006). Windsor's *Economic Revitalization Community Improvement Plan* (2011) explains that the mission of WEDC is to be a "business-driven, business-led organization" so that WEC can be "a region where entrepreneurs thrive and grow and those with export-oriented business models are supported" (p.3). According to the 2011 Plan, financial incentives, such as having an adequate supply of land for "potential investors and corporate decision-makers," will be a key way to attract business investment to the region.

[10] There are a few excellent local-food restaurants – Season's Bistro, Taloola's, Taste Buds, the Green Bean, and the Twisted Apron – which play an important role (unexplored here) in the development of an alternative food landscape in Windsor.

[11] Recent outmigration from the city – arguably due to unemployment – has caused Windsor's urban population to dip to 210,891 from 216,473 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

[12] This shocking number reflects usage only of the twenty food banks in WEC registered with the Ontario Food Bank Association and does not include many food banks in the area which operate through churches and other independent sources (Food for Change, 2009).

[13] WEC's health profile is also noteworthy in this context: it has a higher percentage of obese residents and a lower consumption of fruits and vegetables than most of Ontario (Interview, Health Unit, Jan.31, 2012). In 2009, asthma, blood pressure, arthritis and diabetes were significant health problems compared to Ontario rates (United Way, 2010b).

"Land", "environment" and "growth" have a quite different meaning for WEC residents working in the fields of health, poverty, the environment, and alternative food and agriculture. Common to all of these fields is an interest in the topic of *food* and the promotion of alternative ways of producing and/or accessing it. The multi-sector Food for Change partnership (FCP), which produced the VON/Health Action document *Hungry for Change* (2009), is a good example of a counter-narrative regarding how WEC's economic crisis might be addressed. This document is a "call to action" not only to make food security "everyone's business" but to reassess industrial farming and the just-in-time food distribution system of corporate supermarkets. This initiative appeals to WEC residents to think differently about where their food comes from, and Windsor's relationship to it. It explains why an overwhelming dependence on imported food does not make sense when so many fruits, vegetables and animal products are offered locally. It encourages people to access their food through farmer's markets, farm-direct sales, community and containment gardens, CSAs, coops, and small-scale food processors.[14] It identifies spaces in WEC where local food procurement could take place, such as schools, hospitals, manufacturing plants. Guiding the FCP document is the question of why food cannot be central to building a better future for WEC.

As an alternative place-making narrative, the Food for Change initiative has strengths. For example, it argues for the need to go beyond food banks as a means to food security: "...our call to action must go beyond the short term needs of providing emergency food and must begin to address the systemic issues that are creating an insecure food system for *all local residents*" (Food for Change, 2009: 6, my emphasis). However, one point downplayed in this narrative is the *diversity* of local residents in the area. Far from being a homogenous "community," WEC is a conglomeration of different neighbourhoods, towns and rural areas, marked by class and ethnicity. The absence of certain voices in the counter-narrative above is notable: we do not hear from First Nations people; the relatively large French-speaking population (see City of Windsor 2012a); African Canadians (many with ancestors who arrived in Windsor through the underground railroad from the U.S.); Italians, Portuguese, Lebanese, Latin Americans, and, more recently, new Canadians and refugees from Myanmar (Burma), Somalia, Sudan, etc.; or the large number of migrant workers (primarily from Mexico and the Caribbean) who are intimately connected to food production in WEC through temporary work contracts (for the latter, see Basok, 2002). I make mention of this diversity because there is evidence in the literature that racialized minorities not only access different food, but also may access their food differently. Raja et al (2008) find in their analysis of Erie County, New York, that while there are few supermarkets in what they identify as racialized neighbourhoods (cf. to white neighbourhoods), residents in the racialized neighbourhoods depend on extensive networks of small grocery stores which often offer fresh, culturally desired food. A glance around some of WEC's neighbourhoods indicates that many Italian, Portuguese and Eastern European residents prepare annual vegetable gardens for eating and sharing. These patterns suggest that there may be different modes of food-based place-making occurring in neighbourhoods about which we know very little – and from which we need to learn in order for the Food for Change initiative to develop a more robust counter-narrative.

It should also be noted here that, while the low-income population of WEC is acknowledged in the *Hungry for Change* document, there is no mention of how we might engage with low-income or working class views on good food as part of alliance-building to "all residents." I suggest that one of the ways to do this may be to work creatively with existing class-based narratives. For example, though the CAW call not to "buy foreign" reflects a fairly narrow interest in jobs in automobile production, perhaps this sentiment could be actively bridged to the efforts of the "local" food movement in a way that attracted the interest of manufacturing and service workers.[15] Another possibility is to work through health and safety committees within workplaces, expanding the notion of health to include food. A monument built on Windsor's riverfront, and visited annually on the Day

[14] The City's Downtown Windsor Farmer's Market opened in the old downtown bus terminal in 2009 and the Amherstburg Farmer's Market, located in the County, opened in 2010. Both offer local farmers' produce and goods. CSAs refer to Community Supported Agriculture, where residents (as members) share the costs and the produce of a farm. WECSA (Windsor-Essex Community Agriculture), run by Steve Green, produces organic vegetables and free run eggs and encourages the development of farming skills of its members. However, note that only .5% of the food eaten by residents is locally processed (United Way, 2010a).

[15] This suggestion is not without potential problems. First, there is the issue of calling an automobile "local" simply because it is assembled in Canada. Second, the local food movement, as I envision it at least, is not against all imported food, but is interested in encouraging fair trade, with a focus on "fair miles" rather than on "food miles," in order to support farmers elsewhere. Of course, fair trade has its own set of problems in practice, a topic outside the confines of this paper, but see Lyon and Moberg (2010).

of Mourning (April 28th) to remember those who have died in the workplace, says "Fight for the Living." Could not the food movement fruitfully work with this idea?

3. PROSPECTS, POLITICS AND PUBLICS

Having outlined some of the challenges and potential opportunities in the Windsor situation, I now return to the three questions posed at the beginning of this paper. First, regarding the prospects for localizing the food system in a region like WEC, I have hinted that much will depend on whether food activists can work with and bridge gaps in our knowledge of how all residents engage with and give meaning to food and its acquisition. This will require working with different ethnic and class-based groups in more open, less "client-based" ways. An effective food charter, for example, will very much depend on success in meeting this challenge.

Food charters generally also require the support of municipal governments (as is the case in Toronto, Vancouver, Thunder Bay, London, etc.) because they can lead in food procurement policies and develop bylaws friendly to urban agriculture and edible landscapes. As noted at the beginning of this article, Windsor residents do not seem to have that advantage. However, while the power of the corporate discourse in WEC is still daunting, some cracks have begun to appear, including a few city councillors and municipal administrators becoming supporters of alternative food initiatives. For example, in a surprising turn of events, City Council recently voted to give a one-time grant of $100,000 towards the development of community gardens (City of Windsor, 2012b). Whether this represents a sign of a change of heart is difficult to say. Certainly with the abundant alternative food initiatives taking place across the border in Detroit (Bickford, 2009; Runk, 2010) it is more difficult to argue that "there is no alternative" to the current industrial food system. Moreover, the recent focus of national media on the view that Canada should develop a national food policy – even introducing the concept of "food sovereignty" (Leeder, 2011a; Leeder, 2011b) – helps to normalize the idea that there is something wrong with the current system.

Clearly, however, change as that envisioned by the Food for Change initiative will take patience and time. Peter Bane (2010), calculating what it would take to decrease the vulnerability to industrial food disruptions of a region in south central Indiana similar in population size to WEC, estimates that it may take a generation. In spite of this, Bane notes that there is a range of practical actions that can be taken in the next 15 years that would move things in the right direction.[16] This kind of pragmatic assessment – increasingly being undertaken in different regions of the country and the world – helps to make more concrete the possibilities for localizing food systems for those who doubt the feasibility of such efforts. Taken together – evidence both that persistent local efforts have been able to instigate change and that there is expanding discursive and practical support for the idea of developing alternative food systems for and in cities – gives reason to be hopeful about the prospects for localizing the food system in Windsor-Essex County.

Second, what role can groups like FAWG, our Food Advisory Working Group, play in promoting such change? The strength of FAWG is the students: they have an abundance of energy and creative ideas and are often fearless when it comes to doing advocacy work. Yet, I also find that when students learn experientially (such as meeting with urban planners to discuss the lack of attention to food issues in WEC planning documents), they develop a different connection to food and to Windsor as a place; they become, in a sense, community food citizens.[17] What remains is to consider how our narrative on the importance of fresh, tasty food may appear to residents in the community as a narrative ungrounded in place. A necessary next step will be to talk more openly and reflexively about our own food tastes – and collaborating with residents by hearing and negotiating their understandings of food. It is only in this way that we might take steps to "co-theorize" (Rappaport 2007) with, rather than "civilize," residents in WEC regarding the question of good food and what steps we can take to access it in an ethnically diverse, class-differentiated place.

Finally, we ask why is the case of Windsor important? A pragmatic answer is simply that, for the sake of the environment and our health, everyone should be moving toward community food citizenship. And there are lessons here. One personal lesson I learned is that just because one's research specialty is in some other part of the world this does not mean

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[16] Working in a context of a sympathetic municipal government, Bane (2010) usefully calculates the amount of land and the number of new farmers required for growing real food. Taking a permaculture approach, his calculations include waste and water management, soil remediation and changes in consumption habits.

[17] This kind of personal transformation has been confirmed in a range of campus sustainable food projects in the U.S. (see Barlett, 2011).

that one has an excuse for ignoring the food community in which one actually lives or teaches. This case offers two other points of reflection regarding university-community collaboration and public engagement. While the literature has noted the extent to which university structures and expectations prevent academics from doing collaborative work with communities (Greenwood and Levin, 2001; Field and Fox, 2007), it is not always clear that what communities expect of us is something which we can provide; as one of my colleagues put it: "people in the community really have no idea what it is we do!" The pedagogical moment here is about moving from being perceived as foreigners to becoming familiars, from being viewed as well-resourced knowledge brokers – or "lifestyle migrants" (Hoey, 2010) searching for a "decent cup of coffee" – to recognizing and positioning ourselves as citizens in the communities in which we live. This, I believe, needs to be considered as part of the "publicness" of public social science.

A second related point is that the communities in which we live may draw on our allegiance – and our ethical responsibilities – in contradictory ways, and in ways that might challenge our views as citizens. To return to the metaphor of "eating cars": if cars are the products of a contemporary mode of industrial production, and alternative eating embodies a mode of producing and consuming for "another world," and *both* figure in significant ways in the communities in which we live (the reference in the first case is to a form of livelihood that puts food on the table and, in the second case, to a political project that challenges that livelihood), then how can those differences possibly be bridged in "public" scholarship?

Perhaps some answers to this question will be found in future efforts to co-theorize across difference – a central future task, I believe, for food activists, advocacy groups and public scholars alike.

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