

We began with highlighted excerpts from
On Regionality: What do infrastructures of abundance look like?

By Alicia Kennedy

“How do we feed 9 billion people if not with industrial agriculture?” To which I said, it’s the wrong question. We do not all, on this planet, eat the same. Think smaller. The problem is that the people making a profit off a food system that leaves 821 million people hungry every day do not want everyone thinking smaller, eating regionally. That would carve up the profits.

Thinking on the scale of ecosystems running through a city creates a framework for spatial change; thinking in assemblages of stakeholders and actors creates a framework for social investment and development. These overlapping frameworks are informed and perhaps even defined by the emergent field of landscape democracy. Landscape is understood as the relationship between people and place, both shaping each other. Landscape democracy allows one to see urban space as a field of negotiation between people, places, and power.

“Cultivating the City: Infrastructures of Abundance in Urban Brazil,” Jacques Abelman

Seeking this kind of balance is what brings me back to the dinner conversation and the college class, because while I believe in regional food systems as better way of conceiving the future, I also understand there will be some things that we produce at scale, but that we need to produce them at scale in the best possible way for the land and the laborers. This would likely involve changes to expectations and supplies for things we consider staples, like wheat flour. There will be possibility for adjustment there, which needs to be seen as possibility rather than defeat, like the potential for more little luxuries of seasons—the abundance of what is available. Rather than considering “solutions,” which is a mode of thought that I think gives way to too much reliance on technology, I think we must consider new ways of living and being: How can our lives work seamlessly with the needs of our regional infrastructure and food systems? How can we build infrastructures of abundance rather than scarcity?

DISCUSSION NOTES

Local/Sustainable vs. Accessible:

- In the industry, there are assumptions about value propositions; Local and seasonal are prioritized and accessibility gets sacrificed
- If we switch priorities to accessibility, how do you source? (i.e. do we have metrics for our sourcing at our orgs/businesses that prioritize healthy & affordable choices that might not be local if they can't meet certain criteria like pricing)
- If we talked about subsidies and agribusiness, extractive agriculture and the externalization of environmental costs more, how could that shift strategizing around local sourcing and economic/racial justice?
- Enormous growth in CSAs and yet still small sector of society impacted
- Local network for connecting farmers and vendors and distributors for masses
- System change and policy work is where most of the people are impacted, not just farmers markets & CSAs, definitely not restaurants and fancy groceries

Exploring Accessibility

- Certain kinds of focus on who currently farms in the U.S. erases a lot of access for people who are coming from other places; focus on local without naming race, generational poverty, displacement, migration....erases complexities of why things are so inaccessible to so many populations

- A lot of the choices related to seasonal/local/small sourcing that get focused on are choices only available to privileged/wealthy individuals.
- How do we make sustainable/seasonal/local sourcing choices available for everyone?
 - Accessibility is complicated — even those with EBT are a smaller group and it's not enough money to source well and stretch it
- There is consumer choice and then there's institutional work, policy work, that impacts way more people
- Price - if you're paying your workers fairly the people who are trying to buy it need to be paid fairly and they're not. That's the pain point — economic and racial justice, labor justice
- There is market-based approach that drives consumption/demand rather than policy side driving supply?
- A lot of the work around regenerative agriculture and local foods isn't addressing the inaccessibility, there's a gap in the work, a disconnect between racial and economic justice and regenerative agriculture
 - *Not* because regenerative/local is inherently white; Tutu shared how in Eastern Africa, everyone had a kitchen garden they fed themselves from; if you live in NYC in an apartment building, you can't feed yourself the same way

What infrastructure is needed to “stay local”?

Street vendors

- There's a gap - not focusing on those who actually feed the masses
- What if we were to focus on connecting local farms to the distributors who provide them?
- Look for the farms who could provide for vendors who feed the most people (as opposed to expensive small restaurant)
- What would nurturing a system supporting local sourcing for street vendors require from us?

One of the paths forward for us in studying/strategizing around local/sustainable sourcing in ways that address accessibility and equity is more focus on infrastructure and landscape democracy

- Medium scale infrastructure not being talked about from a policy perspective
- Largely due to lack of imagination
- Supportive structures for a regional scale could be bipartisan and could build up rural areas, offer job creation

Example: Composting in LA (shared by Julia)

- Largest food waste in the country, coming from wholesale markets and homes
- Nonprofit that partnered with local parks
- Hand composted or mechanical composted- prototyped
- The aim was: What was needed to be able to keep it local and not ship it across the country

What do we mean when we talk about scale?

- Replicating effective models/systems? Multiple systems that are aligned but operating independently
- Not just making a single operation larger and larger
- Consolidation - Negative example
 - 5 distribution companies
 - 10 food companies own everything

Efficiency as barrier

- [Dream Cafe in Detroit](#) as example: Committed to sourcing as much as possible from POC led local farms but these farms couldn't fulfill all the orders so had to run around sourcing in a complex way that put a strain on staff and took much more time and coordination
- Why isn't it sustainable to order from 15 different small farmers?
 - Time is such an issue for overworked food operators with tight margins — thus the reliance on one or two distributors, minimizing different delivery schedules, order deadlines, number of emails, etc
 - Distributors like Greenmarket Co, Lancaster, etc help streamline bc you know they do decent sourcing and you don't have time to work with 15 different small vendors
 - Can technology (apps?) allow for it to be sustainable to source from all these different vendors

Sourcing changes from the supply side

- Where is the demand coming from? What if it came from producers more?
- If there's a weather event and there aren't tomatoes...
 - So then you have to get tomatoes elsewhere and don't source sustainably/locally
 - What if instead, then we don't have tomatoes?
 - Some of it is mindset - feeling like we HAVE to have tomatoes even if the weather didn't allow for it in the place you live
- NY farmer advocating for eating radicchio bc it grows so well here
 - why do we grow things that don't do well here and take on that financial loss risk?
 - growing high demand crops but they don't do as well
 - Farmers growing what performs well but not in demand...so how do we create a system that might limit choice to some extent but better for the place we're growing and eating in? Growing what works and creating a system with less choice but more sustainable success?

Sustainable and/or local sourcing?

- Tension and question - local sourcing and immigration, so much of migration and making a home for yourself and raising a family is based on food traditions that aren't local by definition and necessity; and this preservation is equal to health - it's a tension!
- Tech dollars going to plant-based foods are creating a not very nutritious reality and definitely not situational and local foods
- How do we create systems that prioritize good growing practices in season and don't compete with local?
 - Farm to People
 - Now carries bananas and avocados- they source the best they can find but all year and not local because they're best sellers
 - Carry Harry's Berries when Tristar aren't available...but question is do we work to not eat non seasonal things ever?
 - Harry's berries; \$10/box; Strawberries overnighted to NYC; Icon status and such a luxury - story and brand vs real sustainability

Example technological attempt to shift sourcing practices from the supply side:

[Regen Network](#) (this is their language)

- **PROBLEM:** Broken economic models incentivize the degradation of land, destroy ecosystems and fuel climate change.
- **SOLUTION:** incentivize regenerative land use practices, restore ecosystems and reverse climate change.

FOR SOURCING SESSION 2:

Considerations on how to have the conversation:

- Let's make sure we address blind spots the group may have — different life experiences, work experiences, access to resources, etc
- We want to make sure we are going for more complicated conversations rather than simplifying the issues.
- Food systems sit at the nexus of so many industries — such as city planning — it could be interesting/helpful to get their perspectives in our conversations and get them to listen to ours

What we're considering entering Sourcing Session 2:

- Infrastructure and policy work vs market-based, privileged consumer “solutions” and choices
- Blind spots; there is so often a lack of perspectives and strategies from the Global South and historically/intentionally marginalized communities locally
- The contradictions within sustainable/local sourcing having to do with accessibility need to be addressed through shifting resources and focus to networks of support and infrastructures of abundance and democracy defined and lived by Black, migrant, Indigenous, Global South communities.

Some specific questions for Session 2:

Who is missing from our different circles and who do we all wish was in our circles?

What are local growers expecting for the new farm bill?

How do worker-owned grocery stores make their sourcing decisions considering good practices and affordability?

Broader themes and thoughts to keep in mind:

- The desire to shift from transaction to exchange
- The need to be gentle in our transitions while creating pathways for better systems to emerge
- Solutions need to be cooperative and embrace multiplicity; there are many paths, not just one solution