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Ailsa Beischer, Jon Corbett

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## **Food justice as a response to hunger on our Canadian foodscapes: How a community-gleaning project is addressing depoliticized food insecurity through a food justice praxis.**

**Ailsa Beischer** Graduate Student **and Jon Corbett** Associate Professor,  
Institute for Community Engaged Research,

### **Abstract**

Increasingly, hunger and malnutrition are understood through the framework of food security. We argue that a series of intersecting and contemporary issues have depoliticized the concept of food security. Furthermore, the 'alternative food movement' ('AFM'), which has grown in response to food insecurity rates, has failed to adequately address deeply embedded disparities within the food system and in instances has created new inequalities. As a result, unequal access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, remains a largely invisible political issue. Using the example of a community-gleaning project in British Columbia, Canada, we explore how a food justice praxis helps build community capacity to influence policy around food poverty, as well as contributes to making issues of food justice more visible. We use the term praxis to reflect the merging of reflection and action, and as a tool to transform the world. We believe that when integrated through a community-based project, such as the Collaborative Harvest program in Kelowna, B.C., a food justice praxis can establish democratic, participatory, and equitable food systems in ways that a depoliticized food security framework cannot.

### **Keywords**

Food security; food poverty; neoliberalism; alternative food movement; gleaning.

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## 1. Introduction

Hunger is a largely unseen problem throughout Canada today. Typically, hunger and malnutrition are viewed through the framework of food security “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2014, p. 50). However, growing food poverty rates against the backdrop of neoliberal restructuring of the global food system, reductions in social security programs at the national level, the associated rise of charitable food relief, and emerging place-based niche food movements have eroded the political efficacy of food security. In this article, we intentionally use the term food poverty as an alternative frame for describing the more systemic causes of hunger. We begin by contextualizing how unequal access to good food has largely become an invisible issue in an environment where food security has become increasingly depoliticized. We further argue that, while the ‘alternative food movement’ (‘AFM’) has emerged in response to growing food insecurity rates (Heldke, 2009), its failure to detach from this ineffective framework and negotiate a more socially just agenda maintains the invisibility of food injustices and even creates new injustices. Specifically looking at Canada, we emphasize that food is a political medium through which issues of social justice and food democracy can be made visible on our foodscapes. To do this, we look at how an agricultural gleaning project closely connected to a Food Policy Council (FPC) in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley is engaging a food justice praxis to make food poverty and inequality a visible issue as a precursor to an equitable food democracy and broader political transformation.

## 2. Methodology

This study largely grew out of a pragmatic need in the community of Kelowna, B.C. to address social inequities in the context of increasing food poverty. We first conduct a literature review to contextualize the depoliticization of a food security framework and

ground our analysis in an emerging body of food justice literature. We then draw on a combination of existing literature, local reports, news articles, personal communication, and data from our emerging study to discuss the local FPC and community-gleaning project. Employing community based and participatory action research principles, we have carried out a focus group with key stakeholders working in the field of food security and six photovoice projects and semi-structured interviews with participants who identified as food insecure. The research was started in June 2015, but is ongoing given the multiple and complex barriers faced by individuals experiencing food insecurity. Thus far the research has shown a significant obstacle for participants has been health problems linked to poor nutrition. Our discussion of the gleaning project and food justice is more firmly rooted in Beischer's experiential findings from her role as the coordinator of the gleaning project and through our emergent study.

### **3. The Depoliticization of Hunger**

The issue of hunger was first brought to international attention in 1933, though it was not until the 1970s global food crisis, characterized by unprecedented increases in the cost of staple foods, that the term food security was coined (Allen, 2009). The act of defining food security at the 1974 World Food Conference was significant because it acknowledged the inalienable right to freedom from hunger on the international stage, and further identified the state's role in ensuring this right was upheld (Allen, 1999b). More recently, food security has been re-emphasized within the context of the post-2015 Development Agenda and Millennium Development Goals as a "right to adequate food" (FAO, IFAD, & WFO, 2015). However, despite the declarations and rhetoric presented at world summits and international conventions, as well as governments' constant reaffirmation of the right to food, it has been argued that food insecurity has become increasingly depoliticized while hunger rates persist as a serious social problem and health concern (Riches, 1999; Jacques, 2015). Weak efforts to combat hunger and poverty over recent decades suggest that ensuring equal access to good food is not

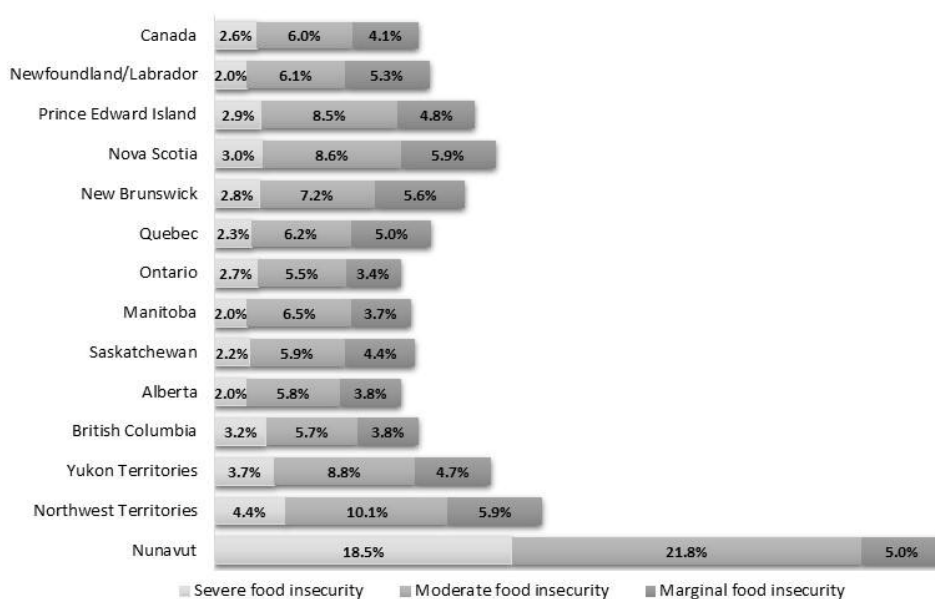
regarded as a matter of political concern in wealthy countries (Riches, 2011; Jacques, 2015).

### **Food insecurity and food poverty in Canada**

Deteriorating food poverty conditions since the 1980s can be largely viewed as a consequence of neoliberalism, an ideology that influences political-economic governance based on the continual expansion of market relations and significant reductions in social security programs (Larner, 2000). These policies have disarmed the political nature of food security by transforming people into individual, 'me-first' consumers as opposed to socially responsible, engaged citizens that hold their government accountable for addressing the food needs of each person (Riches, 2011). In Canada, the contemporary persistence of food insecurity is rooted in the tenacious levels of poverty, hunger, and inequality created and maintained by neoliberal policies. While affluent nations rarely experience large scale and protracted hunger crises (more commonly manifest through famine and drought), the "lack of access to food is a deep, prevalent, and serious threat to the health and well-being of the population as a whole, and of children in particular" (Heldke, 2009, p. 213). According to the Household Food Insecurity in Canada report, 4 million people experienced food insecurity in 2012, characterized by buying less, cheaper, and nutritionally-poor food, skipping meals or going days without eating (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2014). In a special mission to examine how the right to adequate food is being realized in Canada, the UN Special Rapporteur found that many of those who experience food insecurity are likely to be members of vulnerable or marginalized groups: households with low-income, individuals on social assistance, those who don't own their own dwelling, women single-parent households, Aboriginal populations living off-reserve, and new immigrant households (De Schutter, 2012). Perhaps one of the most shameful examples is that Aboriginal households in Northern Canada face rates of food insecurity more than double (27 percent) that of the average Canadian household level (12 percent) (Council

of Canadian Academies, 2014). These alarming food poverty rates are due in part to neoliberal restructuring of the global food system, which has consistently undermined the right to food and eroded the political efficacy of a food security framework. As a result this social injustice is often not reflected in the political discourse.

**Figure 1 : Household Food Insecurity in Canada, by Province.**



(from Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2014)

### Neoliberal restructuring of the global food system

In recent years, barriers to accessing sufficient, safe, and nutritious food have been linked to a unique phenomenon in the neoliberal restructuring of the global food system -- too much of the wrong kind of food (Holt-Gimenez, 2012; Jacques, 2015). Rapid technological developments made in agriculture over the last 70- 80 years means that the world currently produces 1 ½ times the amount of food to feed every person on the planet (Holt-Gimenez, 2012). Yet, growing numbers of people are malnourished and overweight due to the overproduction of cheap food full of sugar, salt, fat, starch, artificial coloring and preservatives, and pesticide residues. This nutritionally-poor food

is made readily accessible through what Jacques (2015) calls the “lax, often corporate-designed, regulatory environment of neoliberalism” (p. 432) that privileges big agribusiness, subsidies, and transcontinental trade agreements (Slocum, 2007; Morales, 2011; Donald & Blay-Palmer, 2006). While current statistics outlined in the State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015 report show that worldwide hunger has been reduced by 147 million people in the last decade (FAO, 2015), it does not account for the systemic malnutrition, namely the widespread epidemic of obesity in some areas (and ironically the disproportionate hunger in others), heart disease, diabetes, and cancer (Rosset, 2006; Slocum, 2007). Undoubtedly, global food insecurity has been recognized as a defining issue in the 21st century (Riches, 2011; FAO, 2015; Jacobson, 2007), however, arguments for increased food production (BASF Agro, 2010; Foley, 2011; Foley et al., 2011; John Deere, 2012; Monsanto, 2009; Patel, 2011 in Cadieux & Slocum, 2015, p. 3) mean that the systemic issues of access to good food remain invisible and do not gain traction in the political discourse. As V. Shiva (2008) notes “the tragedy of industrialized, globalized agriculture is that while commodity markets grow, people starve” (p.127).

### **State retrenchment and the rise of emergency food relief**

At the state level, drastic cuts to social assistance programs have further sanitized the concept of food security. Specifically, the right to food has been eroded through the privatization of welfare administration, increasingly strict eligibility criteria, the reduction of benefits that are already inadequate to begin with, and, in British Columbia, Canada, the denial of benefits to those convicted of welfare fraud (Riches, 2002; Mirchandani & Chan, 2005). Instead of ensuring constitutional or legal protection of the right to food, policymakers have transferred responsibility to the emergency food sector, relying on volunteers and charity to fill the gaps while providing little funding (De Schutter, 2012; Allen, 1999a; Alkon, 2013). As a result, emergency food relief programs have become “secondary extensions to weakened social safety nets” (Riches, 2002, p. 648).

Food banks, centralized warehouses where surplus food is collected, stored, and distributed free of charge to hungry people, are perhaps the most common form of food relief in North America (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen, & Skinner, 2012). The first Canadian food bank opened in Edmonton, Alberta in 1981 with the intention of being a temporary relief operation during the recession of the 1980s (Tarasuk, 2001). However, the number of food banks has grown steadily since then and demand for food assistance is “occurring on a scale not witnessed since the Great Depression of the 1930s” (Tarasuk, 2001, p. 488). According to the HungerCount 2014 report, over 841,000 Canadians rely on food banks each month (CAFB, 2014). Approximately 30 percent of food banks in Canada reported that they are unable to meet growing demands for food because social assistance benefits have not increased with the cost of living in the past 20 years (CAFB, 2014). For example, the cut-off for a basic standard of living for a single adult is estimated to be \$17,813 annually and social assistance benefits fall nearly \$10,000 short (CAFB, 2014). A study conducted by Goldberg and Green (2009) also found that a 10 percent cut in social assistance benefits increases food bank usage by 14 percent, indicating that cutbacks to the welfare state are directly correlated to food poverty.

While food banks have become a normal and accepted form of hunger relief (Riches, 2002), they come up short on addressing food poverty and have been criticized on the nutritional inadequacy of the food being offered, the inability to cope with growing demand, and the lack of dialogue with food relief users over their needs and desires (Poppendieck, 1999). Among the more harmful consequences for users accessing food banks are the cost to human dignity when receiving charity and the erosion of social cohesion. One participant of our fieldwork explains her experience:

“It left emotional scars. Even still, as I’m talking to you about it I’m having a physical reaction remembering that first time I went and stood in a food bank line up. There are horrible, horrible, horrible feelings of shame around that. And they don’t really go away. Like 10, 15 years later when I’m going to the food bank because it’s the only way I know



how to keep my child well fed and myself healthy enough to take care of him, [it's the] same feelings of shame and self-criticism."

Critics further argue that those most likely to volunteer for anti-hunger initiatives are the middle-class and that this denies the possibility of equality because it divides participants into dichotomies such as the donor and the recipient, the powerful and the powerless, the competent and the inadequate, the proud and the shamed, and those who define the conditions or rules and those who conform (Poppendieck, 1999; Wakefield et al., 2012; Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Undoubtedly, the stigma associated with food bank use indicates that this is a difficult, emotionally taxing, and inequitable way to access food; yet for donors and volunteers giving cans of food has become culturally and publicly acceptable (Riches, 2011).

More pointedly, both Poppendieck (1999) and Riches (2002) argue that food banks have assumed the task of feeding the hungry during an era of state retrenchment and have thus become a primary component of the shadow state (Wakefield et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2001). The shadow state entails the replacement of publicly provided services by private or non-profit initiatives in an ongoing neoliberal attempt to de-emphasize or 'roll back' the state and withdraw from the provision of social services (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Indeed, emergency food relief plays an important role in mitigating some of the serious consequences of hunger and in preventing social unrest. However, the 25 percent increase in Canadian food bank usage since 2008 (CAFB, 2014) indicates that food banks have been unable to adequately address food poverty and are ultimately an expression of the state's failure to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food (Riches, 2002). The consequence is that unequal access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food, remains a largely invisible political and social justice issue on our foodscapes.

### **The 'alternative food movement'**

In recent years, critiques of the global food system have identified longstanding injustices perpetuated against the working poor, indigenous communities, minorities,

and other marginalized groups (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). The literature further reflects that a food security framework has been unable to equitably meet the nutritional needs of all people (Helkde, 2009; Tarasuk, 2001; Wakefield et al., 2012; Riches, 2011). These discussions have given way to an emerging 'AFM' that encourages consumers choose food that is fresh, local, and often organic over industrially produced and processed food (Guthman, 2011; Heldke, 2009). We will discuss the new 'AFM' below.

Although a broad and diverse movement with many subsets (Alkon, 2013), the 'AFM' emerged with the core purpose of establishing "regenerative food system[s]" to help people "control, understand, and influence the food they eat" (Werkheiser & Noll, 2014, p. 202). In an effort to unlink from the global food system, food in this context is re-framed within a uniquely place-based paradigm (Levkoe, 2014). Adjectives such as 'alternative', 'specialty', 'quality', and 'local' have formed a new conversation around understanding food systems. Within this discourse, the emerging narratives of 'we do have choices', 'it's a choice we have to make', and 'vote with your forks, three votes a day' have become standard slogans of the 'AFM' (Donald & Blay-Palmer, 2006; Dixon, 2014). However, this 'food-is-a-personal-choice' narrative is inadequate because it assumes that eating nutritious, local food is a dietary choice that can be enjoyed by anyone (Werkheiser & Noll, 2014; Slocum, 2007). By ignoring the structural constraints to accessing food and the lived realities of hunger, poverty, and disenfranchisement of those who don't get to "vote with [their] fork", the 'AFM' has failed to address deeply embedded disparities in the food system and even perpetuates unequal access to food in some cases (Levkoe, 2014; Werkheiser & Noll, 2014). More explicitly, it has yet to address how it creates spaces of exclusion along the discursive lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, age, and diversability, among other marginalized peoples (Guthman, 2011; Slocum, 2007).

Critics suggest that calls from within the 'AFM' to "shape up and eat right [...] obscure the fact that not everyone has access to the produce aisle" (Spicher, 2004, para 3). Meanwhile, "the 21st century wealthy are dieting, exercising, and buying locally grown

[food] while the poor bear the brunt of a food and agriculture system gone awry” (Spicher, 2004). Despite the advancement of the ‘AFM’, those with limited incomes typically rely on cheap, nutritionally-poor food to meet their dietary needs. While the ‘AFM’ emerged in opposition to the global food system and inadequacies of the food security framework, it has not extricated itself from the food security paradigm. Thus, it only adopted a limited interpretation of the multifaceted and intersecting disparities in our food systems at both the global and local level. Instead, we propose that the ‘AFM’ should be re-conceptualized as important foundation on which food insecurity can be reframed within a social justice perspective in order to advance food systems that are participatory and equitable.

### **Food justice as a response to food insecurity**

The concept of social justice according to Young (1979) is based on the degree to which a society contains and supports the “institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” (Young, 1990, p 39). In the context of food poverty, social justice becomes food justice, which creates a new and more comprehensive language for understanding the spaces of marginalization and exclusion on our foodscapes (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). ‘Food justice’ as defined by the Community Alliance for Global Food Justice (2013) is “the right of communities everywhere to produce, distribute, access, and eat good food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community. Good food is healthful, local, sustainable, culturally appropriate, humane, and produced for the sustenance of people and the planet”. Put simply, food justice is a response to deeply-embedded food, and the associated income, inequality that stems from weak policies. It seeks to question and transform our food systems by asking where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, accessed, and eaten (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). As an emergent idea food justice continues to be subject to multiple definitions as a theory, a symbolic or political tool, or a claim made by different groups and social or

political forces with a multitude of goals or interests (Lang & Heasman, 2004; Community Alliance for Global Food Justice, 2013; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Just Food, 2010; Loo, 2014). Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) point out that food justice has the capacity to open new channels for social and political change, and plays an important role in advancing a broader vision of food as a human right. Given this understanding, we believe that a food justice praxis is the most useful means of employing this idea. Praxis refers to “the melding of theory/reflection and practice/action as part of a conscious struggle to transform the world” (Wakefield, 2007, p. 331). As a reflexive and situated dynamic, praxis offers the tools to collaborate with marginalized groups and create a collective research experience that addresses their goals or needs (Wakefield, 2007). When integrated in the community in a concrete way, a food justice praxis can establish democratic and equitable food systems in ways that a depoliticized food security framework cannot.

#### **4. Kelowna, B.C.’s Community-Based Gleaning Project**

##### **Food injustice in Kelowna**

To examine the issue of the need for a greater inclusion of the principles of justice in the ‘AFM’, we use the example of a gleaning project located in Kelowna, B.C., Canada. In recent years this mid-size city in the Okanagan Valley has become regional centre for alternative food initiatives and a “full-fledged foodie destination” (Michaels, 2014). This transformation is evidenced by the increasing number of specialized grocery stores, small businesses, and farm gates selling usually expensive local and organic fare, the steady rise of wine culture, and the farm-to-table concept in which diners can indulge in high-priced dishes made from ingredients traced back to local farms and orchards (Michaels, 2014). While these emerging food trends indicate the growing presence of an alternative food system offering new ways to access food in Kelowna, they target a niche demographic, catering to the palates of white, middle and upper class citizens and tourists.

Historically, Kelowna was a small rural community that specialized in ranching, forestry, and fruit production (Aguilar, Tomic, & Trumper, 2005). Until recently it has remained an enclave of the British Empire with strong colonial roots, a history of Aboriginal displacement, and a noticeable disdain toward non-white groups. Since the 1980s the city has been re-imagined and re-designed as an ideal retirement location, a playground, a site for advanced technology, and finally a place of 'whiteness', 'sameness', and 'familiarity' (Aguilar et al., 2005). The City of Kelowna website exemplifies some of these trends as it boasts of fine-dining, unique downtown shops, orchards, vineyards and wine-tastings at internationally-acclaimed wineries, golf courses, ski hills, and boating, swimming, and fishing activities (City of Kelowna, 2009). On the other hand, Kelowna is infamously known for its "urban clean-up campaigns and gentrification aimed at purifying public spaces" in order to erase difference (Holmes, 2012, p. 225). With just six percent of the population identifying as a visible minority (compared to the national average of 19 percent, and 27 percent in B.C.) and only 4.5 percent identifying as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2013a; Central Okanagan Foundation, 2013), the city's intolerance to difference is especially evident. Therefore, it is the discourses of Christian conservatism, white colonial attitudes, and the promotion and privileging of middle and upper class social norms that construct entitlements and exclusions to the benefits of society in Kelowna (Holmes, 2012).

When projected onto local foodscapes, these discourses and practices make food poverty an invisible issue that is noticeably missing in the public or political dialogue in Kelowna. Therefore, despite the overt, and often ostentatious, rise of the 'AFM' in Kelowna, access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food continues to be a critical issue for many: food bank usage grew by four percent in Kelowna and West Kelowna in 2014 alone (Jeffery, 2014). In the month of March 2014, 4,000 people from these communities (with a combined population of 148,000) relied on the food bank to meet their dietary needs and over one-third of those users were children (Jeffery, 2014). These numbers are likely higher in as some food insecure individuals do not to use the food bank (use

alternative strategies such as gleaning, dumpster diving, and gardening to meet food needs), are not eligible (temporary foreign workers, persons with no fixed address), or use other local food relief organizations (Beischer, in progress). No official food security statistics exist in Kelowna, but 14.6 percent of the population lives below the poverty line compared to 8.8 percent nationally (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2013b).

The fact that food poverty is a growing problem in Kelowna is particularly unsettling given the agricultural abundance of the region. Renowned for its grape and apple production, Kelowna also grows plenty of other fruits like cherries, apricots, peaches, pears, and plums. Beyond the well-established fruit industry, it is home to many local farms and there is no shortage of fresh, nutritious, local food in the Okanagan (City of Kelowna, 2009). Perhaps more disconcerting than the unequal access to this abundance, is the large quantity of produce that goes to waste from the city's fields and orchards. While there are no official estimates on food waste for the region, the BC Tree Fruits packinghouse in Kelowna estimates that only 85 percent of the apples grown in the area are brought to the packinghouse (Anonymous, personal communication, March 25, 2015). From there, a further 10 percent, or one million kilograms, are culled. This means that an approximate total of 25 percent of all apples grown in the region go to waste (Anonymous, personal communication, March 25, 2015). The packinghouse also estimates that the percentage of wasted fruit is mostly likely much higher for softer fruits such as cherries, apricots, and peaches (Anonymous, personal communication, March 25, 2015). Given that the city is historically and culturally rooted in agriculture, a significant number of Kelowna houses have one or more fruit trees on their property. Anecdotes from fruit tree owners show that wasted fruit is a significant concern, but many do not have the time, ability, or desire to harvest their trees. As one owner put it, "I wasn't sure what we were going to do with [the apples] and it felt terribly wasteful to just let them fall on the ground" (Smith, 2014). Both the food poverty rates and food waste occurring in orchards, farms, and backyard fruit trees illustrates the embedded

and systemic food injustices that persist within evolving alternative food paradigm in Kelowna.

### **Food Policy Councils and gleaning initiatives**

Food injustice continues to be rooted in globalization, state retrenchment, emergency food relief, as well as the 'AFM'. However, there are a growing number of initiatives that demonstrate how a food justice praxis is being used to make food poverty visible in communities and how, in the process, it engages citizens and repoliticizes these issues. Food Policy Councils (FPCs) strongly exemplify the effort to transform local systems through citizen participation and a commitment to equity and sustainability (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011). In Canada, the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) stands as one of the most successful examples to date; as a sub-committee of Toronto's Board of Health, it is the only FPC in North America to be integrated into a city department and have its Food Charter adopted and used by the city as a guideline for planning, policy, and program development to create a socially just food system (Wekerle, 2004). As a result, it is strategically positioned to influence policy and bring together stakeholders from diverse food sectors to create long-term, sustainable solutions to ensure the right to food. The unique positioning of the TFPC and the municipal endorsement of its Food Charter has exclusively enabled it to carve out a new political space for food justice in Toronto.

Because FPCs act as intermediaries between the community and policymakers, it is increasingly understood that they have the ability to amplify the voices at the margins and improve equity in the community's food system (McCullagh, 2012). Furthermore, they often recognize that action and activity within the community has the capacity to directly influence policy (McCullagh, 2012). The Central Okanagan Food Policy Council (COFPC) based in Kelowna aims to engage its citizenry in local food issues and advocate for political change in the food system (COFPC, 2008). Unlike the TFPC, the COFPC was born into a municipal context of indifference to food security and, to date, has received

little support from local government. The organization began as a grassroots initiative called the Healthy Food Council, which was a need identified by the community in a food security forum held in 2006 (COFPC, 2008). With representation from local dietitians, activists, the Central Okanagan Community Gardens Society, the local food bank, and concerned citizens, the group aimed to cultivate a more just and sustainable food system by addressing three key issues identified in the forum: high levels of poverty, under-resourced community food programs, and barriers to local food production and food access (COFPC, 2008).

One of the COFPC's most successful food justice projects to date is a gleaning initiative that has recently become a separate non-profit organization called the Okanagan Fruit Tree Project (OFTP). The initiative, started by a group of dietitians and incubated by the COFPC, was launched in 2012 in response to the linked issues of food waste and growing food inequality in Kelowna. Gleaning involves gathering surplus produce from fields and orchards after the harvest is finished (Almquist, 2012). Dating back to Roman times, gleaning is often carried out by individuals in need. Although the practice dwindled in the middle of the 19th century with the improvement of real wages and innovative harvest technology, it has re-emerged in North America as a humanitarian ethic (Maclas, 1996) that closely aligns with the principles of food justice identified above. Today, gleaning programs exist throughout North America from Arizona, where 20 million pounds of fresh food are harvested each year (Hoisington, Butkus, Garrett, & Beerman, 2001) to the urban Fruit Tree Projects in British Columbia such as those in Victoria, Vancouver, Kamloops, and the Okanagan.

The OFTP's mandate is to increase the availability of fresh and nutritious produce for those in need, reduce food waste, promote participation and inclusion, and provide dignified access to food. It achieves this by turning backyard fruit trees and also orchards, vegetable gardens, farm plots, and nut trees into a valuable source of food for the community by harvesting otherwise wasted produce. Fruit tree owners with excess fruit contact the organization and then the coordinator recruits gleaners through their



volunteer email list. To date, the organization has over 350 volunteers and there is often a wait-list to volunteer with the project. The volunteer gleaners may be professionals, retirees, children, low-income individuals, at-risk youth, single parents, or those living with mental health issues among others. All partake in an effort to recover food that would otherwise be wasted.

Harvested produce is shared among the tree owners, volunteer pickers, and local social service agencies to help alleviate hunger in the community. Typically, contemporary gleaning programs use the thirds model, giving one-third of the harvest each to the tree owner, volunteers, and social service agencies (Marshman, 2015). During the first picking season in 2012, the dietitians leading the project decided, with the support of the COFPC board members, that division of fruit amounts should be flexible in order to cater to the needs of the most vulnerable members of the project (C Hamilton 2015, pers. comm., 12 November). OFTP management has kept this principle in place due to the growing number of new volunteer sign-ups who identify as food insecure. A few volunteers have expressed concerns about the decision not to employ the thirds model, but the management believes that the flexibility allows gleaners in need to take more fruit and solves the problem that most homeowners ask to keep less than one percent of the fruit gleaned. While the OFTP has a large volunteer base, the organization has not collected statistics on the exact number of food insecure volunteers or other demographic information because it aims to erase divisive practices and create an atmosphere of inclusion and equality (Hamilton, 2015).

**Table 1 : Okanagan Fruit Tree Project Statistics, 2012-2015**

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of Fruit/Vegetable Picks	27	52	111	93
Total Kgs Picked	2,322	8,033	16,893	24,141
Kgs to community organizations	2,139	6,825	13,007	16,230
Kgs to Volunteers	158	1,163	3,652	1,984
Kgs to Tree owners	25	45	243	226

(From OFTP Organizational Statistics, 2015)

Studies that examine the use and utility of gleaned produce provide insight into some of the current implications of this collective form of harvesting. A. Hoisington's et al.'s (2001) study of a gleaning project in Washington, USA found that 48 percent of the harvested produce taken home was preserved through canning, freezing, drying and pickling to create a year-round supply of food, while nine percent was eaten fresh. A further 43 percent was given away to neighbours, friends, and family members in need. This suggests that gleaning plays a significant role in community-building through fostering a sense of sharing and goodwill. One OFTP volunteer shared her experience of empowerment in harvesting her own food and having enough to share with others:

"The gift that you gave us with the extra apples we had picked (getting to take it home) enabled us to bring some to a local family - a single mother of 4, as well as a couple who have just moved here after having been flooded out of their home in Calgary. We ourselves also benefited - we have been trying to survive on one income and a backlog of bills and the apples were much needed for ourselves as well, thank you."

Participants in Hoisington's et. al.'s (2001) study identified other benefits of gleaning, which include reciprocity around sharing knowledge of recipes, gardening and food preservation tips, stretching food budgets, feeling a sense accomplishment, gaining a social support network, and physical fitness. Moreover, gleaning programs that assume

a humanitarian goal and work at the community level may have the ability “to empower or enhance people’s capacities to control their own lives by acting on their health and nutrition to their own satisfaction” (Hoisington et al., 2001, p. 46). The OFTP management believes that their volunteer experience can provide a dignified and empowered means to accessing food because volunteers are helping tree owners and harvesting fruit for others in need as well as for themselves in a community-building setting (Hamilton, 2015). In speaking about her experience of gleaning and food insecurity, one participant said, “gleaning [...] feels way more dignified than standing in a line at the food bank” (Beischer, in progress).

Other studies reflect similar findings regarding how the fresh produce is used and the skills or other positive outcomes for those involved in a gleaning project. K. Drage’s study (2003), examines two gleaning projects in Oregon, USA, and situates them within human and social capital frameworks; a further study done by Cook, Gallagher, Holzman, Neracher, and Miotke (2015) focuses on a specific organizational need like financial sustainability. Thus far, existing studies on gleaning have not been situated within a food justice framework. However, these studies contribute to understanding the implications gleaning might have for creating democratic, participatory, and socially just food systems. While gleaning projects often function as a form of emergency food relief by harvesting unused produce and reallocating it to those in need, they often, though not explicitly articulated, draw on food justice principles. This helps build community capacity to influence policy around food poverty.

Image 1: OFTP volunteers harvesting red delicious apples in Kelowna (OFTP, 2015).



Image 2: A. Beischer (left) and friend harvesting apples in Kelowna (OFTP, 2015).



Image 3: Getting the apples ready to deliver to local charities in Kelowna (OFTP, 2015).



Image 4: Sorting cherries with volunteers before dividing the harvest (OFTP, 2015).



Image 5: New residents to Kelowna who joined the project to meet new people and give back to the community (OFTP, 2015).



## 5. Re-Politicization of Hunger Through a Food Justice Praxis

Reaffirming the right to food is “a profoundly political issue” (Riches, 1999). Conceptualizing food as a right under a food justice lens not only invites critical analysis about the depoliticization of food security, but also offers a framework to ensure that vulnerable groups are positioned at the center of political discussion regarding how, by whom, and to what ends the food system is transformed (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Further, as a form of praxis, food justice offers practical tools for creating new systems predicated on justice, equality, and human rights (Food Secure Canada, 2014).

Against the backdrop of increasing food poverty rates, food waste, government retrenchment, institutionalized food relief, and the emergence of new forms of exclusions under the ‘AFM’, “food is a salient issue for everyone and thus a potential moment of politicization” (Allen, 1999a, p. 120). Despite the agricultural abundance of



Kelowna and the Okanagan Valley, we have shown that food waste is a common, if not growing, concern. Yet, there is a disconnect between wasted fruit and vegetables and hungry neighbours. The OFTP's gleaning activities are significant because the organization is harnessing the issue of food waste in local orchards, farms, and backyards as an indirect means to create a space for engaging with food justice. Gleaning projects might initially attract broader community interest through their volunteer opportunities, promise of fresh produce, and through the easily visible and therefore more understandable issue of food waste. However, based on A. Beischer's experience as the coordinator for the OFTP, we believe that gleaning programs that draw on the principles of food justice not only facilitate access to food, but also enable a democratic and participatory model that makes food poverty a visible issue as a precursor to political action.

Beischer began working for the OFTP in 2013 in its second year of operation, and soon realized that the organization and practice of gleaning was addressing a gap in the food system in an unanticipated way – the need among some of the gleaners and recipients of fruit donations for inclusion in the food system and the community more generally. Both groups articulated their experiences of food insecurity and sense of exclusion from the Okanagan's emerging 'alternative food movement'. Commonly, these individuals rely on low-priced, nutritionally poor food or emergency food assistance (Beischer, in progress).

In fact, many Kelowna's citizens have limited access to healthy produce due to barriers outlined in the Dietitians of Canada's Cost of Eating 2011 report: income level, purchasing power, proximity to places where food is sold, mobility, and lack of knowledge or space for food preparation and storage (2012). One way the OFTP makes food injustice a visible issue is through its commitment to a participatory and inclusive model. The organization's mandate to include all people, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender, diversability, or other identities, allows people of different backgrounds to come together to pick fruit to supplement their dietary needs or to

donate to social service agencies. Since its start in 2012, OFTP volunteers have picked close to 49,000 kgs of fruit and shared it with 40 social service agencies and their clients. In 2014 the project expanded into the South Okanagan in the community of Penticton. This success has garnered much media attention from Okanagan communities and elsewhere in the province (Smith, 2014; Everitt, 2014; McLeod, 2014; Shore, 2014), which has helped put food poverty back into mainstream discussion. Successful grant requests and growing community support further indicate attention to the issue. This publicity demonstrates how the emergence of the 'AFM' in Kelowna provided a platform for the grassroots food poverty project to take hold and garner the interest of a wider audience and, more recently, the City of Kelowna. Currently, the municipal leadership is looking at developing a Healthy City Strategy that includes recognition of the importance of healthy food systems (BC Healthy Communities, 2015). Thus, it is evident that the OFTP not only promotes access to local and nutritious food, but also increases awareness, which can be seen as a precursor to food democracy and broader political transformation.

With this new awareness about the way inclusion and community-building can lead to food justice, A. Beischer helped design and implement the Collaborative Harvest Program. This program is an outgrowth of the OFTP's gleaning project and draws on food justice principles. The program works with clients of social service agencies to offer opportunities for empowerment and inclusion through harvesting local food and taking part in food preservation workshops. Further, the program is specifically designed to cultivate community and engage citizens who are marginalized or face barriers to participation by adopting a flexible framework, celebrating diversabilities (promoting equity and inclusion), and offering opportunities to learn new skills and participate in the community in a meaningful way. Since 2012, the OFTP has included clients from partner agencies in fruit harvests on a small scale. In 2014, the project was piloted with clients from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), the Karis Support Society that works with women experiencing mental illness and addiction, and Cool Arts, a local

charity that provides community art experiences for adults with developmental disabilities.

While Kelowna citizens living in poverty have the options of buying discounted, day-old produce or accessing services such as food banks, the OFTP's findings from 2014 suggest that the act of harvesting fruit for personal use and the act of participating in the Collaborative Harvest program empowers individuals, improves mental and physical health, facilitates a sense of belonging and community, addresses food poverty, and enables citizens to access food with dignity. Over the 2015 picking season, the project continued to work with CMHA and the Karis Support Society as well as two new non-profits: Freedom's Door, a treatment program for men struggling with alcohol and drug addictions issues, and NOW Canada, a program for women and youth who have experienced addictions, abuse, sexual exploitation, and mental health challenges. The Metis Community Services Society and Westbank First Nation Youth Program also expressed interest in participating in the program.

Another significant way the OFTP is engaging a food justice praxis is through an online mapping platform. Working in partnership with the Institute for Community Engaged Research at the University of British Columbia, students co-created a geoweb-based map that charts the fruit trees that OFTP volunteers have picked and others yet to be picked. The map contains multiple layers - some of which are private and others specifically intended to be a resource for the community. For example, one public layer shows organizations that donate and distribute food. "Maps create connections between people and places" and participatory processes help represent and create these connections (Sanderson, 2007, p. 126). The shared goal with this map is to compile information around food access in the community into a tool that is readily available to those who experience food poverty while making disparities in access a visible issue. The intersection of a community food project with online participatory mapping is a pragmatic effort to engage the population through a dialogical and action-oriented approach to political change. Specifically, the map offers a way to



visualize and understand the political, spatial, and social justice dimensions of food inequality. In summary, the OFTP aims to make food poverty a visible issue through a variety of platforms (participation in gleaning activities, media and online mapping) to challenge the depoliticized nature of food security and the inequalities that persist despite the claims to food equality by the 'AFM'.

## 6. Conclusion

While the OFTP has not explicitly articulated a food justice mandate, its goals are congruent with the principles of food justice. Furthermore, unintended outcomes of the project reify the possibilities of a food justice praxis. The OFTP has galvanized the community through what would initially appear to be relatively benign acts of volunteerism and charity. However, in the process it has not only increased a sense of awareness about hunger in the community, but also led to the unintentional re-politicization of individuals. As a result, the project's food justice inclinations have directly contributed to challenging the marginalization and inequalities in current food systems by presenting pragmatic new avenues for food democracy and equality.

Critics like J. Poppendieck (1999) point out that efforts to alleviate hunger through emergency food relief have undermined movements that seek to end poverty because they focus the attention, energy, and funding on food. While gleaning is a form of food relief, the OFTP has received little to no criticism on this aspect. The OFTP management believe that this is due to the organization's focus on capacity building through its programs and close partnership with the COFPC to redesign the food system through policy. Furthermore, the OFTP recognizes that food poverty is framed and addressed through government policy often born from grassroots initiatives. Developing citizen awareness and participation through volunteerism, as stated in The City of Kelowna Social Policy 360 is an initiative of the project (City of Kelowna, 2013). Creating this community engagement can help ensure hunger and poverty are continuously issues of high importance for policy makers.

In giving due credit, the 'AFM' has provided an important foundation and initial starting point for re-envisioning alternative food systems. However, its inability to extricate itself from the depoliticized food security framework and its current existence as a predominantly white, middle-classed movement does not address how class, gender, race, culture, and ability, among other groupings affects access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Instead, we have endeavoured to show how a food justice praxis embedded in a community project makes food poverty and unequal access to food a visible issue and, in the process, re-politicizes it.

**About the authors:** **Ailsa Beischer** Graduate Student and **Jon Corbett** Associate Professor, Institute for Community Engaged Research

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