



## **New Immigrants in Local Food Systems: Two Iowa Cases**

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**Abstract.** Integrating immigrants in local food systems involves negotiations between complex meaning systems. An experience in working with immigrants and local food efforts in two Iowa communities shows that new social relationships are intersected by critical aspects such as trust (a component of social capital), political power (political capital), knowledge (human capital), and ethnic and cultural world views (cultural capital). Our analysis identified subtle and unrecognized hegemonic behavior and racialization (an unacknowledged culture of whiteness within the local/alternative food system) that inadvertently excludes Latinos and immigrants from the local food system. For these Latino farmers and gardeners, sharing agricultural produce with family and friends was more important than market-oriented strategies. Food is a major transmitter of cultural capital and builds social capital with extended family and with others in the community. By substituting food produced by the family for purchased food, family and friends receive a better diet and perhaps lower food costs. Growing and preparing food offers a way to give back to the community. Participation in farmer training fostered an inclusive, diverse and participatory community, but that did not extend to effective inclusion of Latino residents in the local food group nor to an effective inter-cultural incubator farm. It may be that a farm incubator with a focus on immigrant farmers would be more successful if it were not directly linked to an educational institution. The outside organizers inadvertently strengthened a culture of whiteness, as they had different goals for the food system than did the local participants.

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## Introduction

Rural Iowa, like the rest of the United States, is increasingly investing in local food production and the creation of local food systems. A variety of actors and institutions are involved, all stressing the importance of local foods. However, these actors and institutions seek very diverse ends: stopping globalization and providing fair wages to food system workers, increasing local economic security of both producers and consumers, increasing social inclusion and interaction, contributing to local economic development, combating obesity, improving the ecosystem health and increasing animal welfare, and mitigating climate change (Flora, 2009). This article examines an under-examined issue in the light of a singular means with diverse ends: how can efforts to create local food systems be inclusive of diverse ethnic and racial groups?

We have chosen to use the concept of whiteness to analyse how people assumed to be of a different race or ethnicity, particularly new migrants (Cloke, 2004; Martinot, 2010; Erel, 2011), are inadvertently excluded simply because places where alternative or local food systems are unconsciously imbued with whiteness, a form of cultural capital.

Guthman argues that: '[T]he purpose of an engagement with whiteness is not to determine who is racist or not, but to uncover what whites think about being white and what effects that has on a racial system... one can be nominally nonracist and still contribute to a racial society' (Guthman, 2008a, p. 390). She highlights two implicit, but important, features of whiteness:

'[T]he doctrine of color blindness... does its own violence by erasing the violence that the social construct of race has wrought in the form of racism... [W]hiteness acts as... a set of expectations and institutional benefits... [that] work to naturalize inequalities... The other manifestation of whiteness is universalism, or the assumption that values held primarily by whites are normal and widely shared... This move erases difference in another way, by refusing to acknowledge the experience, aesthetics, and ideals of others, with the pernicious effect that those who do not conform to white ideals are justifiably marginalized' (Guthman, 2008a, pp. 390–391.)

In what way does unconscious racialization affect the strategies implemented by the dominant group focused on utilitarian ends, but not process? How can two sets of goals – those of the dominant Anglo (European American) group and those of Latinos – be joined by setting aside racialized assumptions? By examining two projects designed to increase the inclusion of new immigrants in emergent local food systems, we attempt to identify key issues of social, cultural, political, financial and built capital that must be addressed for such inclusion to take place.

Working with ISU Sociology Extension and the local community college, the first community implemented a farm incubator program for both immigrant Latino farmers and beginning Anglo farmers. At the same time, a wider range of partners, with the local Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) in the lead, organized a local food group. In the second community, Sociology Extension and the local RC&D undertook the rejuvenation of a Latino community gardening effort.

Rural Iowa is, as most of the rest of the rural resource-dependent U.S., decreasing in population (ERS, 2011). Sixty-two of Iowa's 99 counties lost population between 2000 and 2010. Outmigration of rural youth is reflected in an increasingly older age

of farmers in the state. Extension's efforts to involve Latino immigrants in local food systems was based on the following assumptions.

1. Iowa needs a new generation of community-scale organic and sustainable farmers and market gardeners; and Latino immigrants, many of whom have previous experience in agriculture, whether in their country of origin or in other parts of the U.S., have much to contribute to the resurgence of food production for local use (Lewis, 2007; Thompson, 2011).
2. Building a local food system is a shared goal among different sectors of the rural population in an area.
3. Integration of immigrants through agricultural and food systems could be achieved by working with individual Latino farmers and gardeners and developing leadership and/or agency despite cultural and political power differences.
4. Immigrant participants are interested in marketing their produce and achieving successful business outcomes.

Analysis of these efforts made us readdress our initial assumptions. We found that:

1. farmers and beginning immigrant farmers need more knowledge of and experience in vegetable production in Iowa;
2. the outside organizers had different goals for the food system than did local participants – both Anglo and Latino;
3. cultural differences between organizers and immigrants and social and political vulnerability of Latino families in new immigrant destinations make it difficult for Latinos to actively participate and continue in these kinds of projects; and
4. for these Latino farmers and gardeners, sharing agricultural produce with family and friends had more importance than market-oriented strategies.

## **Background**

Local food systems across the United States are increasingly viewed as a part of a social movement<sup>1</sup> with the capacity of changing what is eaten and how it is grown and transported, thus creating healthier communities. Local food systems provide an alternative to transnational food companies and their focus on short-term profits (Kloppenburger et al., 1996; Allen, 1999, 2004; Feenstra, 2002; Allen et al., 2003). Supporters and followers of alternative/local food systems adopt the discourse of a social movement, thereby placing themselves as agents of change, where local food systems are depicted as instruments that can save urban and rural communities from their economic, environmental and social distresses (Buttel, 2000; Nabhan, 2002; Pollan, 2006; Macias, 2008). Since so much is expected of local food systems in terms of systemic change, it is not surprising that projects with a particular output – more production of local foods – might be joined by actors who seek very different outcomes. In particular, those seeking to increase the income of current local farmers and increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables may not be attuned to the social justice outcomes sought by other participants (Flora, 2009). Figure 1 shows the mixture of motivations of groups that make up the loosely allied Good Food movement in the U.S.

There are latent tensions between those in loose alliance around sustainable agriculture and the informal social justice-based alliances that happen to focus on local

food systems. Most of the consumers in alternative food systems, such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Farmers' Markets, are European Americans (culturally white) from middle and upper-middle socio-economic classes (Buttel, 2000; Allen, 2004, 2008; Guthman, 2004, 2008a). Although alternative food systems have inherent benefits, many have proven to reproduce whiteness (Guthman, 2008b, p. 431), with the incorporation of social justice goals into these initiatives often being rather tenuous (Allen, 2008, p. 157).

Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) document an effort to include low-income persons in a collective CSA in Iowa by providing subsidized shares for those who qualified according to their current income. They found that those receiving subsidized shares tended to have social ties with existing members (this was often how they learned about the subsidized shares), and had relatively high levels of education and professionally oriented occupations. Although their current incomes were low, the authors argue that they had other resources that would allow them to obtain good food much more easily than the 'truly poor' (Hinrichs and Kremer, 2002, pp. 83–85).

Alkon and McCullen (2011) engaged in participant observation and conducted in-depth interviews with participants in the North Berkeley and Davis, California farmers' markets. They concluded that two imaginaries<sup>2</sup> are held by the liberal, affluent white group that predominates at the two farmers' markets and 'that resonate closely with the alternative agrifood movement':

'In what we call the white farm imaginary, market participants valorize the predominantly white vendors who "grow their food", rendering invisible the low-paid, predominantly Latino/a workers who do the bulk of the cultivation. Customers draw upon the complimentary [sic] community imaginary to depict themselves, as well as their friends and neighbors, as ethically motivated supporters of struggling family farmers. Many managers, vendors and customers unwittingly draw upon the community imaginary to justify or obscure the structural barriers that prevent the participation of low-income people and people of color' (Alkon and McCullen, 2011, pp. 938–939).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the alternative food movement, by seeking to shorten the value chain so that producer and consumer can in some manner come to know one another, counts as one of its accomplishments the de-fetishizing of production, i.e. allowing consumers to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. However, this family-farmer imaginary may indeed be perpetuating a new fetishized view of the farmer. As Alkon and McCullen (2011) explain, this is done by identifying today's alternative/ sustainable farmers with (white) yeoman family farmers of the pre-industrial agriculture era. That may be a stretch in the Central Valley of California where large industrial farms with substantial hired labor forces have predominated for well over a century (see Pfeffer, 1983). The situation is different in the Midwest, where the yeoman farmer survived (with difficulty) until the Farm Crisis of the 1980s, when the farmer-in-the-middle (the medium-sized commodity farmer) became an endangered species. However, within the local food movement, the small-scale sustainable/alternative farmer is seen as the inheritor of the yeoman farmer mantle. This new fetishism, then, is the failure of the local food discourse to recognize that small-scale producers of fruits and vegetables and even so-called niche livestock producers must employ hired labor. This is true particularly if they are to scale up enough to provide a decent income to the farm operator family and to collectively satisfy

a growing demand for 'relationally' marketed food. Increasingly, hired labor, particularly in the Midwest and South, is immigrant ('non-white') labor. Buck (1997) conducted a survey showing that a majority of California farm-workers preferred to work on large farms over small farms 'because they experienced fewer abuses and received higher wages on the large farms than on the small farms'.

Slocum emphasizes the unconscious aspects of whiteness and the dominance of whiteness in many alternative food spaces:

'The connections among property, privilege and paler skin are evident in alternative food practice. There is a physical clustering of white bodies in the often expensive spaces of community food – conferences, farm tourism, community supported agriculture and alternative food stores – as well as the location, in the feminist sense, of nonprofit staffer vis à vis food insecure person' (Slocum, 2007, p. 526).

Slocum contrasts the Minneapolis farmers' market with markets in other parts of the world:

'The Minneapolis Farmers' Market is colourful, organized and sanitized. And almost no one shouts as they might in markets elsewhere. Couples and friends in pairs or small groups go to the market and walk through absorbed in looking; they smile or simply move through with peaceful expressions on their faces. The point here is to detail the elements of white food space that derive from the normalization of whiteness in the practice of alternative food... The positive feelings expressed on the faces of vendors and customers at the market are important to highlight in this effort to see both exclusion and possibility in alternative food (Slocum, 2007, p. 526).

In 2004–2005, Guthman (2008a) sent surveys to all CSAs and managers of farmers' markets in California and obtained a 37% and 35% response rate, respectively. She followed up this quantitative survey with in-depth interviews with a much smaller number of CSAs and market managers. She also engaged in periodic observation at eight farmers' markets, four of which were in predominantly African-American neighborhoods. Most managers (of both CSAs and farmers' markets) believed that their market spaces were universal spaces and, therefore, some saw no need to reach out to different communities of color (Guthman, 2008a, p. 392). One CSA manager indicated: 'Targeting those in our communities that are ethnic or low income would show a prejudice we don't work within. We do outreach programs to reach everyone interested in eating locally, healthily, and organically' (Guthman, 2008a, pp. 392–393).

A farmers' market manager was more blunt: 'Some of your questions are pretty intrusive – I also found some to be racist. I left these questions blank. This was intentional, not accidental' (Guthman, 2008a, p. 393). In explaining why persons of color did not participate in significant numbers in CSAs and farmers' markets, respondents repeatedly offered personal characteristics, rather than structural reasons, for their lack of participation. One CSA manager said simply: 'Hispanics aren't into fresh, local, and organic products'. These answers illustrate the contradiction of color-blindness: persons call upon personal, hence racial or ethnic, characteristics to explain the non-participation of persons of color.

Given the multiple desired outcomes of those in the local food movement as well as the entrenchment of the conventional food system, it is not easy to establish and

maintain local food systems involving diverse individuals and organizations. Furthermore, the processes implemented by some members of a local food alliance may be at cross-purposes with those of other members. Concretely, it is difficult to reconcile the social justice goals with the goals of the other parts of the movement.

However, it is easy to rationalize away these contradictions. Recent studies in the two communities we studied and elsewhere demonstrate the advantages of Latino/a participation of in agricultural enterprises in Iowa, including community gardens and farms (Thompson, 2011). Latino/a immigrants bring with them agricultural knowledge and social relationships established around food and agriculture. Their participation in gardening and farming was found to integrate them into their communities in ways that reflect the culture they bring with them (particularly food and agriculture) and to provide a venue for demonstrating the values they share with long-term residents (hard work, perseverance, family connections) (Lewis, 2007; Thompson, 2011).

Often, integration is assumed to be the same as acculturation and assimilation, historically determined by the dominant identity of European Americans (King, 2000). These processes have been characterized by an ideology that contends that American means white, and the Americanization (assimilation) process has been reflected in immigration policies that have historically reinforced this view (King, 2000). Immigrant workers are often racialized, as were the Portuguese in Hawaii (Glenn, 2002) and the Irish in Boston (Ignatiev, 1995). At a local level, dominant groups that have access to knowledge, information, and political power drive acculturation. In the U.S., policies from 1920s and 1930s still have strong influence in the Americanization process and in the dominant world-view, which requires immigrants to give up their previous sense of group identity in order for them to become Americans (King, 2005). But, this false sense of 'one people' is not real (King, 2005) in daily life, where perceptions of group differences make inclusion of immigrants and other minority groups more difficult. In small towns in Iowa, where cultural and ethnic diversity is a new (or renewed) phenomenon, the hegemony of white America is still palpable and the cultural and political differences with culturally diverse urban America 'are barely reconcilable' (King, 2005, p. 117). While issues of ethnic/racial dominance and subordination were at the forefront previously in these same communities, the current descendants of those who experienced both sides of those divides were not alive then and the strong force of 'Americanization' has limited or even erased the transmission of those experiences across the generations. The relationships, both social and economic, between long-term, native-born residents and 'ethnic' new-comers are sometimes driven by political rhetoric and discourses of increasing hostility in the everyday life of new immigration destinations (Flora et al., 2011).

Bonding social capital, as Portes (1998) suggests, can have negative consequences for both dominant and excluded groups. An important antidote to the negative aspects of bonding capital is complementing it with bridging social capital. Flora and Flora (2008, p. 126), in examining geographic communities, call the combination of moderate bonding and strong bridging social capital 'progressive participation'. Rusch (2010) examines multi-ethnic organizing in Detroit through a social capital lens. She argues that willingness to risk establishing multi-ethnic ties (bridging social capital) to build a multi-class, multi-ethnic change organization varies according to social position, and can be very much related to race and ethnicity. However, those concerns can be overcome if power relations are discussed frankly and inter-

personal trust (an aspect of bonding social capital) is established one on one. Equally importantly, diverse individuals acting collectively can also build interpersonal trust through their action. Under proper circumstances, bridging and bonding social capital between diverse individuals and organizations can be a virtuous cycle. Attention to political power (a component of political capital) and explicit recognition of cultural capital differences by race and ethnicity and of inequality (financial capital) are all highlighted in Rusch's conclusion regarding successful community organizing:

'Community organizing offers one philosophy of what is necessary for democratic bridging and a strategy for achieving it. The emphasis on power relations in leadership trainings encourages participants to initiate bridging ties that are pragmatic and respectful of diverse communities. Attention to power dynamics and systematic inequalities is not incompatible with the development of interpersonal trust... Organizing methods have been developed to create bridging relationships across deep social divisions. Their example suggests that without explicit attention to power relations, well-intentioned bridging efforts risk reinforcing inequality and compounding mistrust' (Rusch, 2010, p. 499).

However, when organizing local food systems while simultaneously attempting to integrate different groups, each on its own terms, it is difficult to initiate frank discussions of differential power within the group. The very nature of food systems focuses on practical knowledge, where the real interest is around what one uses for pest control or how one picks okra without getting pricked by its stickers.

### **The Project**

The implementing team focused on developing initiatives to prepare Latinos to be part of local food projects. Evaluation was built into each project. Data collection was carried out during the development of the projects involved in these two rural communities from 2008 and 2010. Data sources in both Spanish and English (as appropriate) included focus groups with gardeners and beginning farmers, community organizers, evaluation reports, field-notes, and materials previously presented in conferences and meetings (Emery, 2010).

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) was used when designing, implementing and evaluating both gardening projects, since CCF provides a way of looking at system change by analysing the assets mobilized in community change work across the capitals and the subsequent impacts on the various capitals. Built, financial, political, social, human, cultural, and natural capitals are the seven overlapping capitals that inform this framework. When they come together, they can help to create sustainable communities with healthy ecosystems, vital economies, and social inclusion (Flora and Flora, 2008, p. 19). The Community Capitals Framework makes it easy to recognize that community gardening and production of high-value products for local consumption can have multiple ends and that successful integration of immigrants into local food efforts can imply the mobilization and interaction of cultural and social capital between the symbolic communities involved. The framework was especially useful in discerning the success of alternative food systems, since production and profit were not the key measures in assessing their accomplishments. However, this analysis was not part of a participatory process, but used later in reflection by the researchers.

At the community college site, the project developed an eight-week bilingual, bicultural training program for Latino and Anglo (European American) beginning farmers to prepare them to farm vegetables and to assist them in the first year as tenants on the community college incubator farm. The course was offered through the continuing education program at the community college. In addition, the beginning farmers received assistance from the farm manager in direct marketing through a regional farmers' market and aid through the project in selling to regional retail outlets.

The new farmers held other jobs that kept them very busy, so the class was offered from 2 to 5 p.m. on Sundays, the only day of the week that was available for Latino families. Since that time-period took up a large chunk of family time, it was decided that the classes should serve the entire family, with activities planned for the children to introduce them to agriculture and growing things. For these families, being active together around producing and preparing food was an important legacy and identity to pass on to their children. Adult students (the parents and others of their generation) took turns bringing foods of their ethnicity for snacks. Both Anglos and Latinos brought food. Interpretation was available to bridge the language barrier during the course and for the seed-selection process. Hand-out materials were in both English and Spanish. For each session of the class, farmer-presenters were paired with professionals – Iowa State University (ISU) extension specialists, a private food business consultant, a Practical Farmers of Iowa staff person, and students from ISU's Graduate Program in Sustainable Agriculture. The farmer-teachers had fruit and vegetable or mixed crop-livestock farms. They produced high-value products rather than commodities, and generally had small acreages compared to their corn and soybean farmer neighbors in Iowa. Thus, they could empathize with both Latino and Anglo students' aspirations to become small-scale market gardeners and small livestock producers. This combination of professionals and farmers demonstrated to the students that there are farmers with similar values to their own who are working to improve their farming practices. These farmer-teachers, apart from the formal content of their lessons, conveyed the message that healthy farming practices lead to healthy bodies and environment – and that one can actually make a living from diversified agriculture. They shared their practical knowledge with the students, making the class very accessible for the students. In addition, the Iowa Foundation for Microenterprise and Community Vitality (IFMCV) and a representative from the state Farm Services Agency (FSA/USDA) made brief presentations to the class to let the students know about potential sources of funding for beginning farmers.

Eighteen individuals, nine Anglo and nine Latino, were trained in the first class and of the six teams of farmers that rented land from the incubator farm five were Latino families. Three teams sold at least some produce in a large farmers' market in a metropolitan center an hour's drive from the incubator farm and one experimented with selling directly to local and regional retailers. Two of the Latino families did not sell any of their produce. It was only midway through the season that the leaders in the project became aware of the fact that these families preferred to give any surplus production that the family itself could not consume to family and friends rather than selling the excess. They were more concerned about cementing social ties (building social capital) than they were about earning the modest amount of cash that sale of surplus produce would bring. Furthermore, since the most available sales outlet

was the regional farmers' market, someone in the family would have had to give up much of their Saturday in order to sell their excess produce there.

The class was repeated in 2010 with similar numbers and diversity of students. The class was again about half Anglo and half Latino. A few of the Latinos had done the class the previous year. A greater emphasis was placed on developing farm plans. The section on obtaining external financing was dropped since it was clear from the first years' experience that people were not yet ready to expand their operations to a point where financing was an issue. Only two Latino families continued as tenants on the incubator farm in 2010, and several new Anglo farmers participated, essentially reversing the ratio of the two groups from the previous year. Because almost all of the participants held regular jobs, in retrospect we should not have been surprised by the lack of attention given by the participants to financial capital.

The effort in the other community was aimed at broadening the number of local organizations involved in planning and executing the community garden program that was initiated a few years earlier by the Human Relations Department of one of the meat-packing plants in the town in conjunction with the County Chamber and Development Council. In 2010 there were only two empty plots of the 20 offered for gardening. For the 2011 season, the second year of the rejuvenation project, the number and size of plots was increased and tenancy expanded from Latinos only to include Anglo gardeners.

This site involved collaboration of the regional Resource Conservation and Development entity (RC& D, an NGO that operated under the wing of the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture), the city government (which provided the land and installed a new hydrant in the first year of the project), the New Iowans Center, and Iowa State University Extension, which provided the co-ordinator, a co-author of this article. The collaboration of local organizations in the community gardens project was so strong and enthusiastic by the fall of 2010 that the ISU team relinquished its role and allowed the effort to be organized entirely by local partners, with oversight provided by the RC&D. The new volunteer co-ordinator was a Master Gardener, trained through the ISU Extension Master Gardener program.

The ISU team worked with the Chamber of Commerce in the incubator community to determine the demand for local food from both Anglo and Latino businesses. COMIDA (County of Marshall Investing in Diversified Agriculture) was set up to try to supply that need, with support from Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in its effort to build local food networks. Both the success of the incubator farm and establishment of a local food group were goals of COMIDA. COMIDA was led by a Food Systems Leadership Team composed primarily of two community college faculty members who were the core faculty for the entrepreneurial and diversified agriculture major at the college, the ISU Sociology Extension team (which included three of the authors of this article), along with the incubator farm manager (hired with grant moneys) and the regional director of NCAT, Hannah Lewis, who in the early part of the project had been a member of the ISU Sociology Extension team. Two Latinos were regular participants in the leadership team. Both were international students at ISU, from Mexico and Uruguay. Claudia Prado-Meza generally chaired the meetings, which were run by consensus. None of the Latino residents of the community participated regularly in these monthly leadership meetings, although the incubator farmers were invited. We thus broke one of the rules that we sought to enforce – holding meetings at times that Latinos could participate. While

the training space was not racialized, the space reserved for leadership in COMIDA was.

## Results

The projects were intended to lead to more inclusive, diverse communities, organizations and institutions, and to stronger, more viable local food systems.

More specifically, this meant 1. developing a successful farm incubator to include Latino immigrant tenants, 2. Latino/immigrant participation in local foods systems, and 3. designing a model that could be applied elsewhere. None of these objectives was fully achieved.

### *Including Latino Immigrant Tenants in a Farm Incubator*

All of the participants in both of the projects indicated that they had previous knowledge about agriculture either from their original countries or from other parts of the U.S. However, in both of the sites they had important challenges with their crops that they did not know how to solve and could not be successfully solved by the manager or assistants of the programs. When the project was initiated, ISU Extension, which was experiencing severe budget cut-backs at the hands of the state legislature, had reduced its field horticulturalists to two – one covering the eastern half of the state and the other the western half. A mentorship program involving existing small-scale vegetable farmers or perhaps Master Gardeners would have been an alternative form of delivering technical assistance, and such an effort was mounted in the community garden community. Emery in her evaluation reported that Latino farmers in particular preferred brief, timely, and practical consultations at the plot site, rather than off-site presentations or lectures. That was particularly true for those with less than a high-school education.

The farm incubator now has a completed washing and packing shed on the premises (dedicated in June 2010), thanks to an ear-mark from the local Congressional representative and the support of a local foundation. The community college also suffered budget cuts and was unable to devote enough of its own resources to make the farm prosper. While there is strong moral support from the administration for the effort, the farm remains peripheral to the main function of the college, which is to provide post-secondary training through academic course work. The incubator (with the wash-and-pack station and perhaps later an institutional kitchen) may prosper in the future, but become more closely linked to the academic objectives of the community college. It may be that a farm incubator with a focus on immigrant farmers would be more successful if it were not directly linked to an educational institution.

### *Latino/Immigrant Participation in Local Foods Systems*

An effort to develop a local food system consisting of individuals throughout the food value chain was partly an outgrowth of the monthly leadership team meetings that governed the development of the incubator farm in the community college. However, the emerging Anglo local food community, with leadership from the RC&D and involvement of a number of the Anglo farmers from the cross-cultural

farmer training class, chose to develop a local foods network independent of COMIDA.

Why were Latinos not included initially? The most obvious answer is that they were not an organized group, and that considerable effort would have to be made by the leadership of the local food group to bring them in. COMIDA had been organized in their name, but it did not have local Latino/a leadership. Thus, a strategic decision was made not to expend precious human resources to assure that Latino immigrants (who now make up nearly a quarter of the population of the city) would be active participants, although a general invitation was made. One influential local leader expressed that both goals of establishing a local food group and involving Latinos in it were important goals, but that focusing on the former did not negate bringing in Latinos later.<sup>4</sup>

In the more recent effort, the regional RC&D took the lead in organizing a series of four community meetings (held on Monday nights, when most Latino families would be unable to attend) that culminated, at least initially, in the establishment of a vibrant local food organization. Some of the meetings began with a meal catered by a local restaurant, which was encouraged to include local foods according to the season. Having a meal was seen as an important element in building a local food group. On one occasion, a Latino family brought home-made tamales to the local food planning meeting held in a veterans' home, but was discouraged from doing so in the future because of liability issues around food made in an uninspected kitchen. The willingness to share one's culture with others was trumped by bureaucracy.

The local food group was launched in November 2009, with a celebratory meal and election of a board of directors. The first project was to publish a local food directory for the area 30 miles around the county seat and holds periodic dinners featuring local foods and a speaker. One Latino, a restaurant owner, serves on the board of the local food group, but does not attend regularly. A Latino family, the most loyal Latino participant in the farm incubator, attends occasionally.

In the community gardens case, we believe a successful handing off of responsibility to a local team for coordinating the effort occurred. Although Latino families from the meat-packing plant were involved in their own gardens, they were not successfully included in the planning and technical assistance meetings. Latino advocates on the team, Latinos making up nearly half the local population and an increasing number of Latino professionals in responsible positions in city government and elsewhere facilitated the transition. It is not clear that the meat-packing plant will continue to recruit its workers to participate in the garden. The shift of the space from Latinos only to the whole community will undoubtedly influence the number of Latinos participating and the quality of that participation both positively and negatively.

#### *Designing a Model That Can Be Applied Elsewhere*

Emery found that emerging Latino/immigrant farmers and gardeners had a systemic view of their participation, understanding the multiple capitals impacted by their participation. *By substituting food produced by the family for purchased food, family and friends receive a better diet (human capital) and perhaps lower food costs (financial capital).* The gardeners contribute healthy food to the daily diet in their households and community (*social capital*), thereby easing pressure on the household budget, although the farmers and gardeners were unable to put a dollar value on this benefit.

Among many Latino immigrants, food crops serve a more important function than increasing a household's financial capital.

*Food is a major transmitter of cultural capital.* Cultural capital provides a particular manner for seeing the world, defining what has value, and determining what things are possible to change (Flora and Flora, 2008). It includes world-view, language, ways of knowing, and foodways. Erel (2010) argues that migration results in new ways of producing and reproducing cultural capital that builds on, rather than simply mirrors, power relations of either the country of origin or the country of destination. Migrants create mechanisms of validation for their cultural capital, negotiating both white and migrant institutions and networks. While Erel does not discuss foodways, growing food that represents one's homeland helps new immigrants regain health and keep their identity. Not only are gardening and farming infused with strong cultural meaning, but what one grows – since at least part of what is grown has implications for the food that the family eats – creates a cultural space that is also laden with strong inter-generational cultural values imbedded in national and local culture of both the sending and receiving nation.

Evaluation of these two projects and the study by Diego Thompson (2011) indicate the importance of family in Latinos' agricultural involvement and in foodways. Neither the individual nor community levels are as important as family for immigrant inclusion in their new destinations. Families, however, are not nuclear as in the dominant definition, but include extended family and even fictive kin, such as god-children and *padrinos* (god-parents). Immigrant participation in these two rural communities is driven by families' activities in social and cultural events. The cultural meanings of food and agriculture are reinforced and relived in the daily life with family, traditional meals, and *eventos*. We found that involving children in traditional cultural activities related to farming is important to their parents. Parents were perhaps as proud of what their children did during the farm planning and marketing classes, as what the parents themselves learned.

*Growing and preparing food offers a way to give back to the community.* Social capital is measured through the quality of relations between individuals, in terms of trust, neighborliness and reciprocity; the quantity and extent of relations, in terms of access to or incorporation into networks, groups and institutions; and a shared culture that offers relatively stable and accepted rules for behavior and common frameworks for orienting to the future (Tovey, 2002, p. 1). Latino social relationships in these two rural communities are driven by cultural/traditional/family meanings for which food and agriculture are essential.

*Participation in the farmer training fostered an inclusive, diverse and participatory community.* The bilingual inter-cultural class on farm planning, vegetable production, and marketing is particularly important in that it provided a first opportunity for Anglos to interact with members of the Latino community, and *vice versa*, on an equal basis, centered on a mutual interest. The team learned a great deal about designing and delivering a multicultural farm-training program to both Anglos and Latino immigrants with widely varying levels of formal education. As a result of the conversations between the gardeners and the institutional actors or stakeholders in this project, both groups made progress in creating a common vision of future community gardening and the possibility of selling product at the local farmers' market or elsewhere.

## Discussion

Cultural capital is of particular importance when assessing the outcomes of gardening and local food production, since it relates to foodways, past and present inter-generational experiences with farming and gardening, and identity. In the case of immigrant gardeners and market gardeners, it is important to look at cultural capital from the vantage point of the dominant culture (whiteness) and from the perspective of the immigrants.

Often, we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. A fundamental misperception with which we entered this project was the assumption that immigrant Latinos – particularly those from rural parts of Latin America – would desire to engage in agricultural production for financial profit. We assumed that their prior experience with diversified small-scale agriculture would make them perfect candidates to become high-value agricultural producers and marketers, and that at least some of those individuals would welcome such farming as an alternative source of income to the high-pressure and disagreeable work in meat-packing plants. We assumed that financial capital was central to their interest in growing things. In fact, the motivations for engaging in gardening and small-scale agriculture are much more complex, having to do with family (human and social capital), with cementing social ties (social capital), with concerns around foods (cultural capital), and communing with livestock. Participants were not consulted concerning the capitals that motivated their participation in growing food. This lack of consultation became critical and explains why some participants lost interest and participation. We inadvertently created space for whiteness that should have been more diverse. Our inability to intentionally construct a space that fosters diversity may explain why some participants lost interest in participating in the incubator farm.

Cultural hegemony has resulted in the devaluing of the cultural capital of the new immigrants and others who do not contribute to the larger economic development project. Part of the development project in the United States has been to inculcate dominant foodways and the technologies and life-styles that support them into peoples defined as ‘the other’. ‘The other’ includes all practitioners of alternative and local food systems, regardless of ethnicity, national origin, race, or sex. However, when one examines cultural, social, and political capital among those in this alternative food movement, some of the ‘whiteness’ of the dominant paradigm rubs off and governs relations among those groups.

In part, it might be that the racialized group around whom COMIDA was built (and whose language was used to name it, though Latino residents were not incorporated into its leadership) was viewed as a hindrance in bringing other Anglos into the local food group. The organizers of the local food group may have anticipated complications in terms of negotiating language differences, added efforts in securing Latino participation (had it not been difficult to get them involved in the leadership group of COMIDA?), and possible social and cultural misunderstandings between the two groups. After all, wasn’t organizing a local food group with participation of people all along the food chain difficult enough? Perhaps a step-by-step process would be preferable, they reasoned: build a functioning group and then bring Latinos into it. And, after all, a Latino restaurant owner was included on the board. (His failure to participate in subsequent meetings of the group may have been due to the whiteness of the space created.)

Some gardeners see commercial opportunities where they did not before, and participants learned that Latinos and Anglos can work together in spite of cultural

differences. From the community garden site, not one community gardener sold any produce. It was all consumed at home or given away to family and friends. Families' cultural values related to growing things and sharing them made selling the produce a much lower priority (Thompson, 2011).

## Conclusions

We sought to devise a program that would incorporate Latino immigrant farmers and gardeners into local food systems in Iowa and to learn from the process to inform future efforts in Iowa. Two approaches to that end were tried in two communities with substantial immigrant populations: one approach was to train both Anglo and Latino aspiring farmers to participate as tenants on a community college-owned incubator farm and the other was to rejuvenate a community garden program that had been started by the local subsidiary of a regional meat-packing firm for its employees with support of city government and the local economic development organization.

Collaboration to build and strengthen local food systems that feature multicultural value chains underpinned the project. We attempted to link Latino organizing efforts with grass-roots planning for local food systems. This included bringing new vegetable/specialty growers (immigrant and native born) together with experienced local growers and professionals; establishing a bilingual farmer training program with opportunity to rent plots for organic production at a reasonable rate; and planning and developing marketing systems that link these small-scale growers with local consumers looking for healthy, locally grown produce.

We found that the relatively high level of bonding social capital within the dominant group working for a local food inadvertently bars others from access to a particular group or network. The dominant group working for an alternative food system saw itself in opposition to the industrial agriculture paradigm of most of Iowa agriculture. This oppositional position strengthened their boundaries, and made it more difficult to integrate members who did not share their sustainable agriculture paradigm. Further Latinos identified with their families, not their community. These different approaches to local food issues made finding common ground difficult at times.

In our experience with immigrants in small towns of Iowa, human and political capital (knowledge and power) influenced social and cultural differences that are used either as attributes or barriers, depending on the dominant groups' interests. Community organizing and social change have an important role in overcoming these kinds of power barriers (Biklen, 1983), particularly for the inclusion of new immigrants in small towns in the Midwest. But, these efforts can also be determined by unpredictable results as a consequence of the dynamics of power between community organizers and participants (Biklen, 1983). Immigrants' inclusion needs to be analysed from complex dynamics approaches that need to leave room for unpredictability, uncertainty, flexibility, and innovation (Geyer, 2003).

Our experience in working with immigrants and local food efforts in Iowa shows that new social relationships are intersected by critical aspects such as trust (a component of social capital), political power (political capital), knowledge (human capital), and ethnic and cultural differences (cultural capital). Integration through food and agriculture could be achieved if minority groups are actively involved from the beginning of the projects from the bottom up and including inter-generational ap-

proaches that can enrich the comprehension of food and agriculture of immigrants and more political representation of the second-generation of immigrant families. Our objective, motivated in part by social justice goals, did not correspond with either the goals of the Latino families, who were interested in inter-generational cultural goals and intergroup social capital goals, or the goals of the Anglo local food movement, extremely concerned about sustainable agriculture and viable local economies. The relatively greater success in rejuvenating the community gardens as compared to the team's intervention in the farm incubator project is related to outsiders playing a more limited role in time and depth of involvement in decision-making in the former case than the latter. Whiteness as an unconscious mechanism of exclusion can be overcome by focusing on the actual diverse strengths of the new immigrant farmers, which need to be mutually discovered rather than assumed.

## Notes

1. Flora (2009) suggests that there are in fact many social movements that use good food as a rallying cry.
2. They define *imaginaries* as 'sets of values and symbols that shape the discourses and practices of a social group' (Alkon and McCullen, 2011, p. 998).
3. Alkon and McCullen observed efforts by individuals occupying different positions in the two farmers markets seeking to incorporate into the discourse discussion of the ethnic and social diversity of members in the alternative or just sustainability value chain: 'Thus we are neither completely dismissive nor completely laudatory of farmers markets' abilities to contribute to just sustainability, but recognize that any potential contribution requires that market participants recognize and confront the liberal, elite whiteness that pervades their discourses and practices' (Alkon and McCullen, 2011, p. 939).
4. In 2008, a different approach had been attempted by INCA, the Iowa Network for Community Agriculture, with support from the Chamber of Commerce, ISU Sociology Extension, and the Community College. In that instance, Anglos (European Americans) and Latinos were being organized separately, in anticipation of later being brought together into a single group. A couple of meetings were held with each cultural group (Anglo and Latino) with significant participation and interest from both groups. The effort was truncated by changes in INCA priorities and the organizer's need to find a full-time industrial job.

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