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# TALKING FOOD: MOTIVATIONS OF HOME FOOD PRESERVATION PRACTITIONERS IN KENTUCKY

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TALKING FOOD: MOTIVATIONS OF  
HOME FOOD PRESERVATION PRACTITIONERS IN KENTUCKY

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Lisa Marie Conley

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Shaunna Scott, Professor of Sociology

Lexington, Kentucky

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### TALKING FOOD: MOTIVATIONS OF HOME FOOD PRESERVATION PRACTITIONERS IN KENTUCKY

Recent reports detail a rise in the practice of home food preservation in the United States due to economic woes, nutritional concerns, and increasing devotion to local food production. Home food preservation is the processing of foods in order to extend its shelf-life. Current common approaches to preserving foods at home include pressure canning, freezing, drying, water bath canning, and cellaring/storing. Local food production in four Kentucky counties were examined through in-depth qualitative interviews with home food preservation practitioners to yield a rural/urban comparison. Forty home food preservation practitioners were interviewed between Fall 2009 and Fall 2013. The primary question driving this project is what motivates those who grow gardens and practice home food preservation in an era of readily available, relatively cheap foodstuffs? Secondary questions include, how do the motivations of home food preservation practitioners compare in rural and urban areas? What are the links, if any, between home food preservation and environmental sustainability concerns in rural and urban areas? Each of these questions will be examined through a mixture of qualitative methods and a grounded theoretical approach. In-depth field interviews with 40 preservers, documentary filmmaking, and participant observation were conducted in two rural and two urban Kentucky counties. Interview transcripts were coded by themes, interpreted using hermeneutic analysis, and analyzed by grounded theory. Policy institutes could make gains from this research by building upon already existing community food practices. Agriculture extension agents could use these findings to inform their food preservation programs and improve safety recommendations.

**KEYWORDS:** Home food preservation, home-gardening, motivations, Appalachian Kentucky, Habermas

TALKING FOOD: MOTIVATIONS OF  
HOME FOOD PRESERVATION PRACTITIONERS IN KENTUCKY

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This work is dedicated to my family who introduced me to  
home-gardening and home food preservation.

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Thank you to my wonderful committee—Dr. Shaunna Scott, my chair, who took me in and went to bat for me. You kept me motivated with your positivity and pushed me to be a better writer and scholar. You'll never know how grateful I am and how important your actions were to me. To Dr. Patricia Dyk who supported me, encouraged me to network, and helped me tackle this project and improve my writing habits. Dr. Shannon Bell, your general awesomeness and enthusiasm inspired me to be an innovative qualitative researcher and instructor. Your recommendations strengthened this work and greatly improved it. Dr. David Ditsch I learned a lot from your insights working with Eastern Kentucky communities. You pushed me to quantify my research which also made this dissertation stronger. Dr. Rosalind Harris, although you were not on my committee, you encouraged me to pursue a topic that was close to my heart and I'm happy you did. Thank you all for your support, encouragement, and patience.

Thank you to my participants, who have my enormous gratitude for taking the time to share their stories with me. I could have talked to each of them for days instead of an hour or two. I consistently walked away from our interviews reinvigorated and more hopeful about the human condition. I not only met people with whom I wanted to become lasting friends, but I also met people who improve their communities, who make their time on this earth meaningful and full of fellowship every single day. I met people who are changing the world for the better. Everyone must eat and so many of this study's participants work so hard to make sure the food that others eat is healthy and full of love. I hope I did your words justice.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my father Curtis F. Conley, who passed away before he could see me become an adult. I think he would enjoy reading this since he and my mother both grew up as farm kids in rural Appalachia. Thanks to them, I was lucky enough

to eat from the best home garden around, play in the soil, and taste the sunshine of heirloom tomatoes with my Sunday biscuits and gravy. To my mother Wilma C. Conley, your unconditional love and faith in me kept me going when little else did. Memories of you canning corn, making pickles, and sauerkraut drove my desire to hold on to these traditional foodways in the first place. I don't want to forget. I also dedicate this dissertation to my sister Mary Hall, her husband Vernon, and their son Trey. You've supported me with love and kindness through all the rough spots so I look forward to finally celebrating with you.

To my best friend, Chelsea who fed my soul all these years with your letters and care packages from around the world, much love and many thanks to you. To my old cohort—Jess, Jeremy, Sara, Adam, Megan, Derek, Kathi, Marcus, Chris, and Brad—you will forever remind me of the best times of this undertaking at UK. I am so proud of you all and have enjoyed watching you grow into the scholars you are.

Thank you to the Dodds Family—Charles, Julieta, Adrian, Ana, Charles III, Angie, Kelsie, Lucy, and Charles IV. Since your Alejandro came into my life, you've welcomed me and cheered for me as I worked all these years saying, “I'm almost finished!” All the cards, letters, the flights home for Christmas and summer, the parties, the home-cooked meals, and your love is appreciated. You are a very special family.

Lastly, thank you to Alejandro. It would take a book to write about all you have done in the last six and a half years that made my life more meaningful. You have played many roles—my personal comedian, counselor, best friend, motivational speaker, and amour. Though this dissertation outlasted our love, I will always consider our time together among the best years of my life.



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## Chapter 1- Introduction to the Study

### Home gardens and food preservation: Looking home for food solutions and motivations

*“People want storied foods. When I share things, people love that there’s a story behind it.”  
-Chelsea, Lexington, KY*

This dissertation research originally began with the idea for creating a documentary film on home food preservation that would focus on my mother's practices and include other preservers in my hometown of Daysboro, KY. I was driving back from my adjunct position at Eastern Kentucky University and thinking of the days my family used to preserve food at home. One of the most memorable preserving episodes entailed my mom boiling corn from our garden, then cutting it off the cob in order to let it cool before packing into plastic freezer bags. She covered the curtains, windows, and her workspace with clean sheets to prevent the corn kernels from sticking to everything in sight as she cut and scraped the cobs. The warm, yellow light entered our kitchen through the sheets, the smell of steaming corn hung sweet in the air. I was probably 9 years old and the sheets made our kitchen feel like a huge blanket fort. This was not play, however. I was getting to help my mother preserve the food we would later eat.

A rush of sadness came over me at the thought we had not preserved food in years. My mother stopped preserving food after my father passed away and my sister and I moved away. Like many widows, the work became too much for her. Living alone and cooking for one, she didn't see the purpose of growing a huge garden and preserving it for herself. I had my mom's pressure canner in my possession but never used it. At that time the extent of my preserving as an adult included making jams. I thought about the rest of my hometown and how most people stopped the practice for various reasons. My friends back home were too busy or uninterested in gardening, let alone preserving foods they had grown. It seemed to me, the older generations

who held the traditional food knowledge were passing away and soon this knowledge too would be gone. The documentary film would be the best way to preserve the food knowledge. Pun intended.

My family subsisted on large home gardens and utilized home food preservation as both a way to make ends meet and to carry on longstanding food traditions that for us, represented independence, quality, and care of the land. In photographs of the gardens of my childhood I see the countless hours of work my parents put in after their wage-earning day jobs.



(Conley family garden, June 1984)

It was on this land, barefoot in the dark musty soil, that I related to the natural world more than any childhood friend. At this home I developed my sense of biophilia, or affinity for the natural world and all living things. My memories of glass canning jars filled with a rainbow of foods, include seeing my mother covered in those corn kernels and sweating from all the hot work. I recall my family breaking beans all evening as we watched TV or sat on the porch surrounded by summer night sounds. We never lacked food despite the hard economic times and though the land did not belong to us, we were reassured we belonged to it.

Returning to UK, I was excited to tell my qualitative research professor Dr. Rosalind Harris my idea for the documentary. I knew she would have ideas for the interview process. Instead of focusing on the film, she listened intently and said, “That's your dissertation.” She

suggested the project could add to the understanding of local food systems in Appalachia and it was definitely a project I was passionate about. As I explored the topic in the literature, I realized many people had written about home food preservation's historical and scientific development but few had conducted socio-cultural analysis of the practices, leaving a large gap in the literature.

### **Rising Popularity in Home Food Preservation and Home Gardening**

Since I began this work in earnest in 2009, the topic of home food preservation seemed to be interesting to a few others as we all sought to examine the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis. Suddenly, in 2010 a few sociological articles examining home food preservation could be found, where before none existed (Black, 2010; Campbell, 2010; Click and Ridberg, 2010; and McEntee, 2010). Home food preservation was fast becoming a much-discussed practice in mainstream society. To me, this seemed the natural extension of the discussions of civic agriculture, relocalization of the food system, and other concerns involving the industrial food system. All this research about the need for local food systems, but who had looked at the existing examples of local food systems people had used to survive all these years? In the middle of this research, I attended a session at Rural Sociological Society where a group of students were studying food deserts. They announced an entire community was a food desert and, therefore, needed a program to assist them in addressing their food access problems. The researcher's only measure of food was the availability of grocery stores. In a rural area, neglecting the ability for people to home-garden seemed a glaring omission to me. Undoubtedly, my own history precluded me from thinking about it from that perspective. This is what I love about research—the fact our lives, experiences, and interests can shape our work and make it richer.

In the popular culture over the last several years, beautifully photographed food preservation manuals were published, and the classic 1974, *Putting Food By* was updated into its fifth edition (Hertzberg, Greene, and Vaughan, 2010). Internet blogs were inundated with how-to videos of gardening and food preservation. Urban foodies declared a need to return to self-sufficient food production and a growing number of young adults began starting farms straight out of college or community gardens in their neighborhoods (Rafferty, 2011; Matthews, 2009). Suddenly everyone seemed to be concerned about food and food prices. Marion Nestle (2002) and Michael Pollan (2009, 2006) began to speak about a 'local food revolution.' George Ball, CEO of Burpee Seeds, reported his company's sale of vegetable seeds had increased 40% between 2007 and 2008 (Burros, 2008). Meanwhile participation in home food preservation classes held at county agricultural extension offices outpaced capacity (Warnert, 2008).

The larger social context might help explain why the desire for self-produced foods was growing strong. Economic insecurities, which peaked with the housing market crash in 2008, invoked images of Depression-era practices that forced self-reliance and reminded the United States of a period when people got by on using it up, wearing it out, making it do, or doing without. The conventional food system's reliance upon petroleum for its production, transportation, and consumption, put many people concerned about peak oil on high alert. It has become increasingly harder to ignore the effects of our current industrial food system. Major drought is plaguing California where more than half our food is grown on the good graces of the mountainous snow packs and underground aquifers. Growing Southwest cities are competing with industrial agriculture for dwindling supplies of water. Farming-related environmental news continues to disturb. Underground aquifers are straining to nourish monoculture crops (Gleeson, et al, 2012). Atrazine (a pesticide banned in the European Union) has contaminated the groundwater of the Central U.S. (Wu, et al, 2009). Most recently sewage and excessive



phosphorous from farming has caused a return of toxic algae plumes to Lake Erie, leaving 500,000 people in Toledo without clean drinking water (International Joint Commission, 2014).

The impacts of today's agricultural system can partially be explained by the consolidation of the industry since the 1990s; a result of the changing global market. Resistance to the business practices of these systems has led people to re-envision the food system into something more local and sustainable. Long before Michael Pollan (2009, 2006) and Barbara Kingsolver (2007) turned people on to local foods, food system scholars revealed the increasing corporate consolidation of the food system into the hands of a few agribusiness giants ConAgra, Cargill/Monsanto, and Novartis/Archer-Daniels Midland and discussed the negative implications (Hendrickson, et al. 2001; Heffernan, et al. 1999; Bonnano, et al., 1995). In recent years, we have witnessed the push-back of citizens against these seemingly monolithic, conventional industrial food corporations as more people are organizing along the multifaceted issues of seed sovereignty (Shiva, 2007), agricultural farm workers seeking living wages in the U.S. (Coalition of Immokalee Workers, 2014), and farmer suicide due to debt and weather damage (Khadse and Bhattacharya, 2013). These cases of political struggle are defining the changing relationship of agribusiness industries. These structural and macro-level issues are implicitly connected to micro-level self-sufficient food production practices. In an era where technology and social networking sites are said to alienate, they have also aided important social conversations. The hashtags of Twitter, #Arab Spring, #YesAllWomen, and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown have driven home the point that the global is not some “out there” construction. Global acts impact certain locations. The local and global are not mutually exclusive, but dialectical. Economic practices like capitalism touch nearly every location on the globe, but local actions taken in one’s community can also redefine how global practices are conducted wherever capitalism “puts its foot down” (Bernard, 2003).

## **Starting with Home**

These larger systemic issues provide the heartbeat for this research. The flesh and bones come from what I know best—home. I started crafting my research questions and decided to create a comparative study examining the rural and urban areas of Kentucky. I had several friends from urban backgrounds with no traditional food preservation knowledge, yet, they were canning and gardening in the city. On the contrary, those my age “back home” in rural Kentucky were not gardening and preserving. Why was this? What motivated those who preserved foods in rural Kentucky and what motivated those in urban Kentucky? Thus, a comparative in-depth qualitative study examining the practitioners in rural Eastern Kentucky and urban Central Kentucky began. I selected Wolfe and Lawrence counties because my social capital there would give me entre into the worlds of home food preservation practitioners. I currently live in Lexington (Fayette County) the second largest city in the state. I added Louisville (Jefferson County), the largest, into the comparison as well. To me, this seemed to offer a perfect set of field sites from which to select my purposive sample.

## **The Context: Kentucky**

Though we cannot generalize about home food preservation in the U.S. from a qualitative study of 40 practitioners, Kentucky is an intriguing site to conduct this research. It possesses both a flourishing society of local foods organizations in the urban areas of the state and a history of subsistence agriculture but little local foods discourse in the rural portion. The rural region of Kentucky appears to be in the early stages of food localization efforts; with recent efforts by those within and outside the communities promoting self-sufficient food production now speaking in the language of a “local foods” discourse.

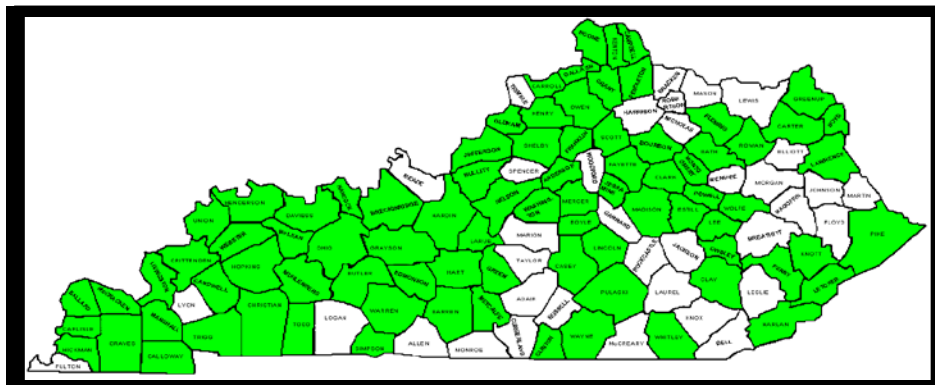
These flourishing local food initiatives are evidenced by new food re-localization initiatives like Grow Appalachia, Community Farm Alliance, and efforts to create farm-to-

school programs with support from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Grow Appalachia, started by John Paul Dejoria (co-founder of John Paul Mitchell Systems) and Patron Tacquila, is an initiative in partnership with Berea College which promotes and assists families growing their own foods in the Appalachian Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee regions (Grow Appalachia, 2014). They provide grants through their partner sites, education, technical assistance, and assistance with raising chickens and keeping honeybees. According to their website, Grow Appalachia

“...meets families where they live and addresses their specific needs. Some families need only help with tillage and fertilization. Some families need to start from scratch. Some elderly and disabled gardeners need help with the hard labor of preparing beds, planting and cultivation, and Grow Appalachia connects them with young people to enable them to keep food security at their own homes.” (Grow Appalachia, 2014)

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture supports farm-to-school programs and has recently created projects like youth chef competitions to gain the interest of high school age students. The graphic below shows the counties that have participated in farm-to-school initiatives in Kentucky in recent years. These programs, which match local farmers to area schools is aimed to address issues of obesity and food access in the region (Kentucky Farm to School Task Force, 2012, pp. 8).

**Fig. 1.1 Kentucky Counties Participating in Kentucky Proud/Farm-to-School Programs**



(Source: Kentucky Department of Agriculture)

Economic development organizations and community activist organizations such as the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, or MACED, have said local food initiatives in Eastern Kentucky could contribute to improved economic development (MACED, 2010, pp. 2). Community Farm Alliance (CFA) has partnered with MACED and the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center to create the Eastern Kentucky Food Systems Collaborative, or Appalfoods. This collaborative effort further supports the creation and strengthening of a local food economy in Eastern Kentucky by providing a network for farmers, gardeners, consumers, health professionals, agriculture extension agents, and educators (Appalfoods, 2014). These partnerships are committed to the expansion or creation of local food systems in both the urban and rural regions of Kentucky with the hope that greater access to locally grown foods might address issues of food access and high rates of diet-related health problems.

What are the connections between locally produced foods, through the methods of home-gardening or community gardening, and health, if any? It is common for many people to say they grow their own food because it is healthier. Looking to the literature, it appears there is

a likely correlation between acts like home-gardening and improved in health and nutrition. Home gardening was used as an intervention to improve health in several countries including Nepal, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Kenya, Guatemala, Thailand, the Philippines, and Senegal and found to increase dietary intake and result in positive health impacts such as decreasing anemia and vitamin A deficiency ( Berti, et al, 2003, pp. 601). In Los Angeles, California a similar intervention demonstrated that home-gardens, in coordination with nutrition and cooking programs, improved health for Latino fourth and fifth graders. These children consumed more fiber, had a reduced body mass, and demonstrated decreased diastolic blood pressure than the children in the control group without these interventions (Davis, et al, 2011, pp. 1227). Another study conducted on single mothers in New Mexico who participate in the WIC program found that exposure to gardening resulted in the person being more likely to grow their own foods. The findings regarding this leading to an increase in vegetable consumption, however, were not significant (Flanigan and Varma, 2006, pp. 73). The health-strengthening aspects of gardening can extend from physical to psychological health, as gardening in Atlanta, Georgia was found to increase positive community influence and alleviate stress, all while improving access to fresh vegetables (Brown and Jameton, 2000, pp. 28). Similarly, community gardens in rural and urban communities in Upstate New York were found to not only improve health through increasing vegetable dietary intake, but the gardens also led to low income communities addressing other pressing neighborhood issues (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 324). Neighborhood watch groups, community babysitting, park and playground development were all side effects sparked through the participating in gardens for the study participants. Whether the links between home-gardening and improved health can be attributed to the physical exercise of the actual gardening, or that easy access to fresh vegetables and fruit translates into eating more

healthily, home-gardening does appear to offer an avenue to better physical health though more studies are needed on the topic.

In the urban areas of Kentucky like Lexington and Louisville, food relocalization is being used to address food deserts, increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and educate individuals on how to utilize their fresh produce. Kentucky's cities have more successful community gardens, farmer's markets, and community supported agriculture than rural areas, likely out of necessity. For example, Louisville's lower-cost CSA share programs like the Shawnee Fresh Stop offered by New Roots, Inc. have aimed to provide fresh foods to low income and other residents who have historically had little access to or familiarity with preparing fresh produce (New Roots, 2011; KET, 2012). Lexington, Kentucky just hired its first local foods coordinator in 2014 to promote local food production through connecting rural Kentucky farmers with markets all over Central Kentucky.

The two counties making up the rural comparison of this research are Wolfe and Lawrence counties. Both of these counties are part of the Central Appalachian region and are located in Eastern Kentucky. The two counties constituting the urban comparison in this study are Fayette and Jefferson. These counties are located in the Central and West-Central regions of the state of Kentucky and make up two points of what is commonly called "The Golden Triangle." The Golden Triangle encompasses Lexington, Louisville, and the Covington, KY/Cincinnati, OH areas, which are home to the fastest growing counties in the state (Estep, 2011). Lexington is the metropolitan area of Fayette County while the city of Louisville is located in Jefferson County. The following chart highlights some basic demographic differences between the rural and urban counties compared in this study, namely that Fayette and Jefferson counties have larger populations, greater percentages of high school and college graduates, and a higher median household income. Residents in Wolfe and Lawrence counties have a greater

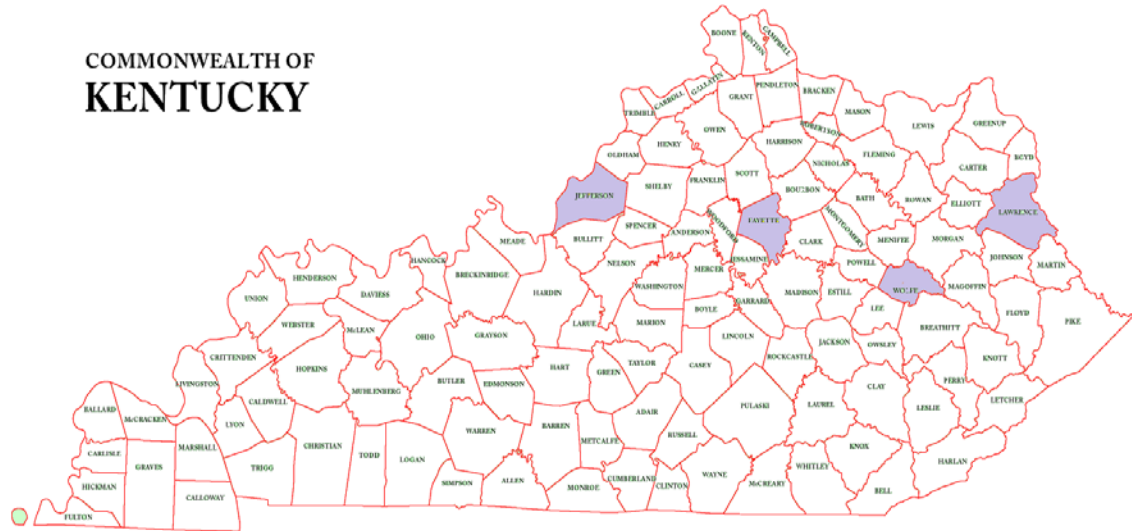
percentage of white, non-Hispanic residents and higher worker commute times than those in Fayette or Jefferson counties.

**Table 1.1, County-level Demographics Snapshot (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)**

	<b>2012 Pop. Estimates (thousands)</b>	<b>2012 Pop. White, alone</b>	<b>2012 Pop. African American</b>	<b>2012 Pop. Hispanic, Latino</b>	<b>Persons below poverty level (2008-2012)</b>	<b>2008-2010 Median Household Income (in 2012 dollars)</b>
<b>Wolfe County</b>	7,164	99%	0.2%	0.7%	41%	\$21,168
<b>Lawrence County</b>	15,848	99%	0.3%	0.6%	27%	\$32,622
<b>Fayette County</b>	305,489	79%	15%	7%	18%	\$48,779
<b>Jefferson County</b>	750,828	74%	21%	5%	17%	\$46,701

	<b>High School Graduate, % of people 25+ (2008-2012)</b>	<b>Bachelor's Degree or Higher, % of people 25+ (2008-2012)</b>	<b>2010 Land Area, in sq. miles</b>	<b>2010 Persons per sq. mile</b>	<b>Mean Travel Time to Work, (2008-2012), in minutes</b>
<b>Wolfe County</b>	63%	11%	222	33	34
<b>Lawrence County</b>	72%	10%	416	38	34
<b>Fayette County</b>	89%	40%	284	1,043	20
<b>Jefferson County</b>	88%	30%	380	1,948	22

**Figure 1.2, Location of Study Counties**



(Source: University of Kentucky, Kentucky Atlas and Gazetteer)

Despite the fact that a drive through many rural Eastern Kentucky areas are peppered with small home gardens, rural areas in general are now labeled by sociology of food and agriculture researchers as “food deserts” (Hubley, 2011; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; USDA 2009; Morton & Blanchard, 2007) if they are located more than 10 miles from a grocery store. Gas stations and convenience stores are not considered good sources of food since they typically offer mostly processed foods and few fresh vegetables and fruits. A (2010) review of the food deserts literature reveals that most food access measures include access to stores, income, race/ethnicity, food store density, cost, and location, amongst others (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010). While some mention of community gardens are included as solutions to rural food deserts (Morton & Blanchard, 2007) self-sufficient, subsistence agriculture like home gardening and home food preservation are typically not included as a measure when examining



food deserts, reflecting a gap in the research. It is important to understand the existing sources of foods that might previously eluded measure as more and more communities express interest in local foods and alternative agriculture.

The urban sectors of KY, discussed here in terms of the metropolitan areas of Lexington (Fayette County) and Louisville (Jefferson County), have seen increased interest, like many urban centers around the nation, in food relocalization efforts over the past decade. This is evidenced by the numerous grassroots organizations in Fayette County like Seedleaf, Sustainable Communities Network, Local Food Percolators, and UK Community Supported Agriculture to name a few. In Jefferson, initiatives like Greenbean Delivery, Healthy in a Hurry Corner Store, the Food Literacy Program, and the Farm to Table Project (Bramer, 2010) aim to fill food deserts in urban Louisville; Louisville's West side was found in 2007 to be a food desert by a research consulting group retained by The Courier Journal, the newspaper of Louisville (Gallagher, 2007, pp. 1). These initiatives have at their core a fundamental desire to transform our conventional food system and make sure everyone has access to fresh, healthy foods. Another program, Transition Louisville, which is partnered with the Colorado Transition Network, consists of Louisville residents working to transition into a more sustainable future in the face of threats from “climate change, peak oil and resource depletion in general, environmental degradation, and economic instability” (Transition Louisville). Some of Transition Louisville’s efforts include re-skilling workshops where members teach others to farm, conduct food preservation, and compost. Seedleaf of Lexington, likewise, offers workshops on gardening and home food preservation with the hope of reducing hunger in Central Kentucky (Seedleaf.org). The fact that re-skilling is needed in Lexington, an area that was formerly called “the agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing center of the trans-

Appalachian west” in 1800 (Billings and Blee, 2000) speaks volumes about the transformations of food systems in Kentucky which resonate with many other states across the country.

While this study juxtaposes the urban central cities of Kentucky to the rural eastern region of Kentucky, I realize creating a strict dichotomy is problematic. The rural and urban areas of Kentucky are actually more fluid and interconnected than disparate. Historically, and contrary to popular belief, those who settled in Eastern Kentucky migrated there mostly from the central Bluegrass region of Kentucky (Billings and Blee, 2000). Today, the cities of Lexington and Louisville are home to many latter generations of Appalachian Kentuckians who moved back to attend universities and seek careers unavailable to them in rural Eastern Kentucky. Connecting the two regions, Interstate 64 and the Bert T. Combs Mountain Parkway are heavily traveled by those looking to shop or seek medical treatment in the urban areas as much as families visiting between the regions. Both rural and urban-dwelling Kentuckians might have links to agrarian family members or a collective memory of agrarianism that drives their interest in local foods or they may share the political ideals of the local foods discourse. This fluidity in geographic space mirrors the fluidity in cultural space between the seemingly disparate rural and urban areas.

### **Methods and Limitations**

I conducted twenty interviews with residents of Wolfe and Lawrence counties from Summer 2009 to Fall 2010 and later twenty interviews were conducted within Fayette and Jefferson Counties from Summer 2012 to Fall 2013; ten in each county for a total of 40 interviews. Practitioners who fit the criteria of being a current home food preservationist or having conducted food preservation within the last 20 years and being between 18-80 years of age were included. This study was approved by the IRB at the University of Kentucky, and while most of the participants were willing to participate openly, I have used pseudonyms to

protect their privacy. Likewise, names of organizations and other identifying information have been changed.

To begin my sample, I first contacted the local agriculture extension agents in each county for suggestions of people who might be interested in home food preservation. Agriculture extension agents are deeply aware of social networks of people interested in agriculture in their communities and often recommended potential participants from those who attended canning workshops in their offices. This posed one snowball sampling validity issue in that the networks of those involved in agriculture extension classes could represent a club-like atmosphere and not represent the typical canner in that community. In order to validate this, I asked the four extension offices the ages of their typical canning class participants. The agriculture extension agents I talked to in all four counties said, by and large, those attending canning classes are usually over the age of 35 and typically retired or homemakers. Since most of the rural participants recruited from agriculture extension in Wolfe and Lawrence were also over the age of 40, I am confident in the validity of these rural findings. For the urban sample, however, this could indicate a sampling bias in that the urban study participants were largely younger.

To collect my sample, I also utilized the listservs of the local school system in Wolfe and Lawrence Counties by sending out an email asking those interested in participating to contact me. This resulted in one contact for Wolfe County and three for Lawrence County. The school system in rural towns represents a large body of social capital for rural counties since the faculty are well connected with the parents of students and constitute a large population of the town themselves. I also used participant observation to assist interviewees in Wolfe and Lawrence Counties “putting up food” like bagging corn for the freezer, washing greens, or

assisting in apple butter production, which allowed me to see the practices of food preservation first hand while interviewing four people.

I took additional steps to increase recruiting reach in the urban counties. Purposive sampling was used to supplement snowball sampling and be more representative of the population, particularly for younger preservers and those in the African American community who were not as represented in the rural sample. Purposive sampling allowed this researcher to build “variety” into the study by including these specific demographics. “Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness” with purposive sampling, particularly here to reach the home food preservation subculture (Stake, 2005, pp. 451). First, I created recruiting fliers and posted them in various farm and canning supply stores in Louisville with the hope that a more diverse group of gardeners and food preservers would get involved. Secondly, to achieve a more representative demographic, I asked a popular Louisville food organization to connect me with people interested in being in the study since the organization specifically serves lower income, African American communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Habermas's work is used from a grounded theory approach throughout this research to examine both the lifeworlds of the practitioners and the colonization of the lifeworld by the industrial agriculture system. This theoretical framework best explains how practitioners develop their motivations and is useful in explaining how one system can dominant another while simultaneously limiting the ability for democratic discourse. Habermas' theory of communicative action provides a space for democracy through striving for true communication. This is possible by limiting the influence of the instruments of money and power, which disenfranchise those who lack these instruments. His concept of the lifeworld and understanding of its colonization provide context for understanding the everyday realities of others lives. The

coordinated, strategic process of addressing the objective, subjective, and social simultaneously is *communicative action*—the goal for Habermas. Through the concept of communicative action, Habermas offered us with the ability to balance the rationality and instrumentalization of the *system* with the *lifeworld*, reducing alienation that comes with modernity through communicating in ways that reach consensus.

The lifeworld, as defined by Habermas, is the taken-for-granted universe of existence that includes one's values, ethics, behaviors, and actions (Habermas, 1984, pp. 13). These are taken for granted because they develop over time through face-to-face interactions and carry assumptions about what societies value. “Communitality rests, to be sure, on consensual knowledge, on a cultural stock of knowledge that members share” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 131). The lifeworld is actually comprised of three worlds—the objective, the social, and the subjective.

The lifeworld can be colonized by certain spheres of society (the *system*), which exert more influence upon the whole. “The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible a heightening of systemic complexity, which becomes so hypertrophied that it unleashes system imperatives that burst the capacity of the lifeworld they instrumentalize” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 155.) For example, the conventional industrial food system can be understood as a colonizer of the lifeworld. It allows for high levels of control, predictability, and reproducibility, which guarantee its success and availability at stores across the nation. Pesticides and herbicides are readily available in our society and are marketed directly to farmers and home-gardeners alike. The relative inexpensive cost of these chemical inputs contrasts drastically to many organic pesticides and herbicides which might be more difficult to find, particularly in small towns. In this way, the industrial agriculture system colonizes the lifeworld, as it leaves little other choice for consumers. It reduces food production to an instrumental system of machine-like parts and

the individuals involved in food production, to people with little decision-making power or choices. The conventional industrial food model operates like a well-oiled machine and in this way, represents Habermas' *system*. It is currently the dominant, taken-for-granted form of food production for most of North America and the companies that profit from it use their considerable power and resources to keep it the dominant form. A medium of instrumental logic—money—“steer[s] a social intercourse that has largely been disconnected from norms and values.. and [has] become independent of their moral political foundations” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 154). Using money as a way to maintain hegemony, the systematic nature of industrial agriculture has emerged in modern society as the dominant form of food production. For these reasons, throughout this work I will refer to the conventional industrial food system as *the system*, meaning it has colonized the lifeworld regarding food.

In article two, we see that the differences in how rural and urban practitioners discuss their motivations for conducting home food preservation rest primarily in the lifeworlds the practitioners occupy. In the third article, we see that the colonization of the lifeworld includes the pervasive advertising of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, so much so, that several of the rural home-gardeners felt they cannot grow food without using the chemicals judiciously, despite stating concerns for their health impacts.

### **The Format of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is composed of three journal articles, connected by chapters linking the material. The first article, which discusses motivations of practitioners in rural Kentucky, was published in the *Kentucky Journal of Anthropology and Sociology* in 2012. Among the most important findings of this first piece of research is that tradition is a large motivating factor for rural home food preservation practitioners. The second article compares the motivating factors between the rural and urban Kentucky home food preservation practitioners. Discussions about

the role of tradition, local food system terminology, and being immersed in the studies of local food systems come to the forefront there. The third article explores sentiments of biophilia indicated in interviews with home gardeners and discusses the possibilities that the practice of home gardening might increase behaviors of environmental sustainability. Both of these unpublished articles will be submitted for publication in Spring 2015.

Connecting these articles are less formal chapters discussing the common threads running between them. The second chapter (linking articles 1 and 2) discusses the shifts in local food knowledge and health concerns in the United States that occurred during the time research began in 2009 and ended in 2013. The third chapter (linking articles 2 and 3) discusses the impetus for reconnecting with nature and places the term biophilia in fuller context within this study. The final chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of whether this seeming food revolution offers anything new, or lasting, to the food trends that have come and gone over the years. It includes two small case studies on what a few participants are doing in their home communities to contribute hope and longevity to the practices of home food preservation and home-gardening.

This dissertation brings together the knowledge of 40 people and their adventures in self-provisioning in rural and urban Kentucky. I, like Chelsea, believe that “people want storied foods.” Giving a homemade jar of blueberry jam to a friend always elicits a story about the recipe or process to make it. I also think people love a good food story. I hope you, the reader, will enjoy these stories from these home gardeners and home food preservation practitioners in Kentucky. I hope I have done their stories justice.

## Article 1

### Talking Food: Home Food Preservation in Eastern Kentucky

#### Abstract

Recent reports detail a rise in the practice of home food preservation in the United States due to economic woes, nutritional concerns, and increasing devotion to local food production. This work examines local food production through the acts of growing one's own food in a subsistence garden and preserving the garden produce at home through various methods (e.g., canning, freezing, drying, burying, cellaring, pickling, and curing). Local food production in two Eastern Kentucky counties was examined through in-depth qualitative interviews with home food preservation practitioners. Twenty home food preservation practitioners were interviewed between Fall 2009 and Summer 2010. Methodologies for data collection included snowball sampling, extended interviews, and participant observation. This research seeks to better understand why home gardeners and home food preservation practitioners are motivated to produce their food in an era of readily available, relatively cheap foodstuffs. Interviews reveal practitioners are motivated foremost by a sense of continuing tradition. Food preservation knowledge was found to be generationally transmitted via female family members. Motivations commonly associated within a local foods discourse were alluded to but not discussed using a clearly articulated local foods discourse. Many practitioners believe that home food preservation is in decline, but insist a return to self-sufficient food production is greatly needed in times of economic hardship. This work contributes to the understanding of local food systems by illustrating the complexity of practitioner motivations and existing food sources in areas commonly considered rural food deserts.

#### Introduction

“We live in a very different world than that of our grandparents. Americans are juggling jobs with the needs of children and aging parents. The time needed to tend a garden is not there for the majority of our citizens, certainly not a garden of sufficient productivity to supply much of a family's year-round food needs.”

- Bonnie McCarvel and Janet Braun, Mid America CropLife Association

News sources have documented steady increases in both home gardening and home food preservation as economic woes and nutritional concerns rise (Associated Press, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Bernard, 2011). Food production has even been discussed in the most notable of North American homes—the White House. When the nation's First Lady, Michele Obama, stated the



2009 White House garden would be “organic” she promptly received a letter from The Crop Life Ambassador Network, a lobbyist group representing the interests of agribusiness giants like Monsanto and Dow Chemical. In addition to the declaration above stating the most time-pressed Americans are unable to grow their own foods, the letter functioned as a unified voice of agribusiness defending the conventional industrial food system. This voice mandates a food production system, which relies upon an industrial supply chain, large-scale implements, petrochemical pesticides and herbicides, and increasing corporate consolidation within the food system. In our time-pressed society, the quote above does beg the question, is tending a garden and producing one’s own food simply a nostalgic throwback to our grandparent’s era? Who will conduct self-sufficient food production and where? This exploration begins at the author’s home- Eastern Kentucky; a site where home gardening and food preservation was experienced firsthand. In Central Appalachia, specifically two Eastern Kentucky counties, twenty interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2010 to explore the impetus behind the self-sufficient food practices of home gardening and food preservation. These qualitative interviews reveal insights into motivations and offer an entry point into further studies of home production. The primary question driving this project is what motivates those who grow gardens and practice home food preservation despite access to relatively cheap and accessible food from grocery stores?

Exploring home food preservation in a rural Kentucky region where the practice was tradition, before the discourse surrounding “local foods” became popular, is important to discuss. First, this work can add to general understandings of food systems in rural areas. Many rural areas are increasingly studied as “food deserts” (Huble, 2011; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; USDA 2009; Morton & Blanchard, 2007; Blanchard & Lyson 2006). A review of food deserts literature conducted in 2010 revealed most food access measures include access to

stores, income, race/ethnicity, food store density, cost, and location, amongst others (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010). While some mention of community gardens are included as solutions to rural food deserts (Morton & Blanchard, 2007, pp. 1), self-sufficient, subsistence agriculture like home gardening and home food preservation are typically not included as a measure when examining food deserts, reflecting a gap in the research. Second, this work could give insights to the notion promoted by local food system supporters that home food preservation is a community-building alternative to the oft criticized “buying local” or “voting with one’s fork” individualism (Click & Ridberg, 2010, pp. 310). Home food preservation practitioners might be motivated by a plethora of reasons- none of which might be associated with local food movement ideals. Teasing out motivations for any practice is a complex process. This research, however, could be duplicated in other regions of North America to yield basic insights into the desires of community members who shape the feasibility of their local food “alternatives.” This research also seeks to fill the gap in the literature of the sociology of agriculture and food by offering a socio-cultural analysis of home food preservation, which until recently, has been lacking.

## **Literature Review**

Previous studies of home food preservation indicate a dearth of knowledge about its socio-cultural aspects as an individual practice of self-sufficiency today. Some works focus on home food preservation as an informal economy while others discuss the practice as an income supplement for the rural elderly that provides maintenance of meaningful self-sufficiency ideologies. Most recent works explore the practices of home food production and preservation from a political and ideological perspective by analyzing the practice for its community-building potential and as an act of food relocalization. Halperin described home food preservation as one of many ways of “making ends meet” in rural Kentucky by exploring the

informal economy (Halperin, 1990, pp. 131). Halperin went on to say home food preservation was part of the balancing act of finding internal or external wage labor with something she calls reciprocal cooperative labor. Other research on food preservation has linked home gardening and home food preservation with practices of self-sufficiency (Quandt, Popyach, & DeWalt, 1994, pp.184). Specifically, Quandt, et al., studied nutritionally vulnerable rural elderly residents who were supplementing their livelihoods with home gardening and food preservation. This coupling of subsistence gardening and home food preservation is not unusual given the instrumental nature of the production and preservation cycles which save abundance from becoming spoiled. Citing remote geographies and cultural norms of rural Kentucky, self-sufficiency and independence were found to be a central tenet in the “food ideology” (Quandt, Popyach, & DeWalt, 1994, pp.195) that prompted the elderly to possess home gardens and preserve their produce.

Few sociological studies specifically examine home food preservation from a socio-cultural perspective. Click and Ridberg (2010) interviewed home food preservation practitioners about politics and found they considered themselves to be members of a food movement (pp. 308). Increases in home food preservation indicated for them a “food revolution” was simmering and practitioners were seen as moving from consumer-oriented approaches (voting with one’s fork/dollars) to supporting environmental beliefs of alternative food movements (Click & Ridberg, 2010, pp. 310). Similarly concerned with motivations of home gardeners, Black (2010) provides a narrative influenced by Habermas that Kentucky vegetable gardeners are not simply agrarian holdovers but are instead motivated by resisting corporate control and industrial food production, thus shaping their “lifeworlds” (pp. 124). Examining “agrobiodiverse” rural gardeners and home food preservation practitioners in the Ozarks, Campbell (2010) found the low-income home-gardeners shared characteristics of frugality,

desire for fresh foods, consumed a diverse selection of wild and cultivated plants, and were politically conservative (pp. 10). McEntee (2010) explored a distinction between contemporary localism and traditional localism in order to move toward a “reflexive localism by examining myriad motivations for consuming local foods in a rural area” (pp. 797). Of all the works that come before, this study most shares commonalities with McEntee’s work in that it is exploring the motivations of home food preservation practitioners to create a more complex understanding of local food.

### **Methods and Data**

I chose to examine Eastern Kentucky, considered Central Appalachia, because of its complex history of subsistence agriculture—one that was “robust” during the antebellum period and then declined during the postbellum era (Billings and Blee, 2000, pp. 157). Despite this decline, subsistence agriculture and small-scale home manufacture were still a large component of the Central Appalachian economy in the years leading to industrialization, 1910-1920s (Billings and Blee, 2000, pp. 168; Scott, 1996, pp. 213). Kingsolver (2011) discusses how mixing cash and non-cash activities like gardening were considered “skills required for community engagement.” The knowledge we consider part of local food systems today were “old hat” for Eastern Kentucky residents who grew up during the Great Depression (Kingsolver, 2011, pp. 144). Two Eastern Kentucky counties, Wolfe and Lawrence, were utilized as a focus area because of their subsistence agriculture history, as well as, the author’s social capital could provide a network of participants. In Eastern Kentucky, residents identify themselves largely by the county they are from, much like residents of large urban areas might identify as being from a particular borough or city quadrant. Thus, a county level approach was most useful and enabled utilization of the county extension offices and schools system listservs.

**Table 2.1, Demographics of Study Counties**

	<b>Wolfe County</b>	<b>Lawrence County</b>
<b>Population (thousands), 2009</b>	7,099	16,573
<b>Land Area (2000 sq. miles), 2009</b>	222.78	418.78
<b>% Pop. White (Non-Hispanic), 2009</b>	98	98
<b>% Pop. African American, 2009</b>	0.4	0.4
<b>% Pop. Hispanic, Latino, 2009</b>	1.3	0.5
<b>% High School Graduate, 2009</b>	54	58
<b>% Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 2009</b>	11	7
<b>Median Household Income, 2008</b>	\$23,310	\$29,015
<b>Average Travel Time to Work (minutes), 2000</b>	34	36

(Source: US Census Bureau QuickFacts)

The study was open to adults of all races and sexes aged 18-80 who self-identify through the screening survey as practitioners of home food preservation, or those who have practiced it in the past 20 years. Participants were recruited by word of mouth and through email from contacts within the public schools and agriculture extension agencies in both Wolfe and Lawrence counties. Potential participants were given a telephone survey to determine eligibility before interviewing. Snowball sampling was then used with eligible contacts until ten participants in each county were interviewed. Having lived in both counties, I used my social capital to make initial contacts who could recommend potential participants through snowball sampling. The public school system was chosen as a recruiting site because of the dense social networks that exist between faculty and community. Agriculture Extension agents have direct contact with home food preservation practitioners and offer classes on preservation so they have many potential contacts.

From September to November 2009 and May to July 2010, I conducted 20 in-depth ethnographic interviews, ten per county. The interviews were casual, largely unstructured, and conversational. Participant observation was conducted at the homes of four participants in the summer of 2010 to reveal actual practices and working relations while corn was cooked and prepared for freezing. Participant observation is essential to “obtain a great breadth of information which allows us to correct biases which may be present in interlocutor’s discourses” (Medina, 2004, pp. 61.) In addition to taking notes and photographs, the participants were recorded using a digital audio recorder and were filmed for a documentary that is in the works. Video was vital in capturing practitioners as they demonstrated their techniques. The film will also serve as a gift to interviewees and an archival medium for future generations since many practitioners do not follow guidelines in books or possess written instructions for their work. I used the following list of questions to indirectly guide me during the interview process. I followed the conversations where they led, but each of the following topics were raised during the interviews for each person.

**Table 2.2, Questions Guiding In-depth Interviews**

What are the reasons for conducting home food preservation?
What foods are commonly preserved?
What length of time has the practitioner preserved foods at home?
Where did practitioners gain their preservation knowledge?
What is the role of home food preservation in the formation and maintenance of community relationships?
How long have participants been and intend to be a practitioner?
How do practitioners situate themselves in the local and global food systems?
How are practitioners engaging in informal exchanges or reciprocal economies?
What are the relations of gender in the process of home food preservation?
What are the economic factors surrounding the practitioner’s use of home food preservation?
What preservation techniques are used?

Using Nvivo, the audio files were transcribed and line-by-line coding was used to produce eight emergent themes. Themes included reasons for practicing home food preservation; sources of knowledge; the role of women in home food preservation; current and anachronistic practices used; market linkages for practitioners; reasons for cessation of home food preservation; and thoughts on the future of home food preservation. Hermeneutic interpretation was used to analyze the case studies in order to prioritize an understanding of practices and discourses situated in larger contexts.

### **Discussion of Findings from Qualitative Interviews**

Median participant age was 62 years. All participants were white, and most participants had at least a high school level of education. Eight participants were retired from previous careers, some possessed college education (four worked in the public school system as teachers or administrators, one had been a professor), three had worked in a factory, and one was a former County Attorney. Five participants were currently employed outside the home—as a school guidance counselor/former home economics teacher, a housecleaner/elderly care worker, a railroad worker, and two are teachers. Two are small business owners (a body shop and a craft/antique shop). Five participants work at home—one schools her children at home; another assists a family member with childcare; one stopped tending a garden and preserving a few years ago because she is taking care of her ill husband; and two work on their family farms. All of the practitioners raised the produce they preserved and a few supplemented what was grown with store bought items and sometimes discounted meats.

The following were the most discussed themes that emerged from conversations with practitioners. Motivations primarily consisted of continuing a traditional practice the interviewees had “always done.” All of the interviewees described an intergenerational transmission of home food preservation from grandmothers to mothers to the interviewee

(current practitioner). Additional themes surfaced that share commonalities with a local food discourse and include a general sense of community-building and socializing through the sharing and preserving of food and skepticism of the industrial food system. Preferred taste of home produced foods and saving money in lean economic times was also commonly stated. Predictions for the future of home food preservation were mixed. Many people said preserving is a “dying art” while others noted increases in gardens as an indication others are picking it up for economic reasons. Most of those interviewed expressed concerns over younger generations not having time or desire to garden or preserve foods. Since the desire to continue a traditional practice, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and the future of home food preservation were the most discussed themes, they will be elaborated here. Additional themes involving gender dynamics amongst practitioners, time constraints, and informal food economies/gifting will be examined more closely in future works.

### ***Teasing out “Tradition” as Motivation***

When asked why they preserved foods at home, every single practitioner initially answered, “It’s just something I’ve always done.” This would imply the practices continue simply out a sense of obligation to tradition. Exploring this claim a bit more, practitioners discussed how they had relied on growing and preserving their own foods as children and continued the practice because it brings back fond memories. Practitioners were happy to share stories of their family working together and truly seemed to enjoy reminiscing about preserving as part of their cultural tradition. Many practitioners also preferred the taste of their home-grown foods and said it is superior to grocery store produce because they control how it is made. Some practitioners were more concerned with cleanliness and taste,



“I remember way back when, before we had electricity or freezers, mom would can the corn and it takes on a different taste canned. But the reason I won't [buy canned corn] is because you shuck that corn and sometimes those little old white worms are on there and the big old worms, and I can't stand worms. [Laughs.] I know that I look at my corn much closer than they do in these commercial processing plants. There is no way in this world that I can think to buy canned corn out of the store.”

Over the course of the interviews several other factors would appear as further impetus to preserve foods. Among those factors, concerns about health and food additives, a sense of pride and accomplishment in producing one's food, a desire to save money, and skepticism of the industrial food system. Bridgette, a retired teacher and agriculture extension agent who diversified her farm by growing grapes for a Lexington, KY winery was the only practitioner to explain her motivations using a clear local foods discourse.

“I'm beginning to worry about everything that we have in commercial canning. Even the lids of the cans, you know, they have the BPA leaking. My daughter has discovered that in the United States you cannot buy the seals for your own home canning that don't have it, but she found a place in Canada that you can purchase them and she's purchasing those.”

Bridgette also stated concerns with salmonella and food safety citing recent food recalls. We spoke at length about Mad Cow Disease, or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), and she stated this was why she consumes only local beef. Bridgette's concerns extended beyond the conventional food system and included vulnerabilities of our food system from terroristic threats as a reason to be vigilant. Citing a news story, Bridgette told me that experts worry the next terrorist act against the United States could come in the form of introducing biological agents into our food supply. When I asked her if she is worried about issues like peak oil, she stated, “Not enough people are worried about the environment or peak oil.” She told me that if the electricity grid were to go down, “city dwellers would have about five days worth of food before starving.”

Not everyone articulated Bridgette's concerns of the health impacts from and vulnerabilities of the industrial food system, though there was general consensus that garden and home preserved foods were better for one's health. Most all the practitioners take pride in their work and commented on the pleasure they derive from being largely food self-sufficient. When asked how it makes them feel to grow their own food and preserve it David answered, "I like to do something that at the end of the year, you have a showing for it." Pauline went on to remark about the satisfaction that comes from watching their garden grow over the months and then having food all winter.

Saving money seemed to be another motivating factor for people who produce their own foods. When asked what she does with the food she cans Pauline replied, "It saves on your grocery budget. You don't have to buy all them groceries... We don't have to run to the grocery and buy our beans all the time, or buy corn." Nearly all practitioners mentioned saving money as an impetus for conducting home food preservation. When asked if the practice would be a good investment for beginners who lack the equipment and knowledge, a few practitioners stated that preservation requires a substantial investment. Several practitioners mentioned inheriting their canning supplies from their mothers or grandmothers. Shelby remarked she enjoyed the memories evoked when using her grandmother's pressure cooker and colander that was handed down to her. Frank remarked that a new pressure canner costs around \$85 to \$120 dollars. He recommends buying them used at yard sales and replacing gauges to ensure proper functionality. Glass jars are reused year to year as long as they are not cracked and many practitioners save some of their own seeds and start their own plants. Though many people save their bean seeds from year to year, fewer saved their tomato seeds (except those who favored

Heirloom varieties), and even fewer started their own potato plants opting to buy these from stores.

### ***Mothers sharing Traditional Knowledge***

In keeping with the findings of D'sa, et al. (2007) who found that 51% of people get their canning knowledge from family or friends (pp. 1), participants stated their food preservation knowledge comes primarily from their mothers or other female family members such as a grandmother or aunt. Every practitioner stated they learned their preservation practices from their mothers, a grandmother, or an aunt. This knowledge was handed down, mostly unwritten, and memorized by the act of participation. When asked who taught him to preserve David stated, "It's been handed down. Our older people, mommy and her grandparents, their neighbors up there did it...Once you get the hang of this, its natural." Beatrice remarked on the length of her participation as a practitioner,

"Since I was a little kid, I helped my momma. So I have continued every year since then...[We canned] most any vegetable that there was, or fruit. Either there was apples we dried, we canned, we sulphured. Beans, we did the same thing- we dried beans, canned beans, pickled beans. Cucumbers, same story there. Made sweet pickles, sour pickles, salt pickles..."

When asked how her mother learned to can, Daisy replied,

"Her mom. Because they had to preserve all their food, because my mother was, you know, a lot older. She was born in 1910, so you know, her mom, I guess, maybe learned from her mother and just passed it generations down. She was older but she had been doing it before I was born."

A few practitioners were either former home economics teachers or had a family member (a mother or sister) who was an agriculture extension agent. In this way their knowledge of preserving was imbued with the food safety guidelines of the United States Department of Agriculture. Frank, who has a community kitchen in his basement and invites

friends over for canning events, joked he first took home economics in high school to “meet girls” but ended up learning about canning. He has preserved ever since and referred to USDA standards during our conversation though he admits to being flexible in his adherence to them. The majority of practitioners, however, admitted they rarely referred to USDA guidelines for food preservation. When asked how she knew the length of time to cook foods to avoid botulism, Phoebe said, “I learned it from my mom. I always helped, from the time I was eight years old, I helped her can. And she would always say, ‘we need to let this cook five hours or whatever, you know.’” She later went on to say she has never had problems with food poisoning and does not know anyone who has. This source of knowledge and a lack of experience with botulism or food poisoning was a common theme among practitioners. Though some practitioners learned to preserve in home economics classes, the primary form of knowledge was passed down from mothers to children and learned through hands-on practice. A few practitioners noted referring to a friend’s recipe or using the Internet to find new jam or pickle recipes but did not refer to online resources for instructional information.

### ***Future of Home Food Preservation***

Two of the twenty practitioners predicted home food preservation will be around in the future. They cited recent increases in gardening and economic decline for this. When asked their opinion on the reasons why more people choose not to conduct home food preservation most practitioners, supporting the sentiment of Mid America CropLife, they stated that people today simply do not have time. Hanna and Dean reflected,

Hanna: "I think a lot of people, they're so busy and they work. It's just faster and more convenient to eat fast food or just buy something that's frozen and thaw it out or cook it that way. They don't want to, I don't think, invest the time that it takes to do it."

Dean: "It's quicker to stop and get a pizza."

Hanna: "A lot of the younger generation, growing up now, they don't have an example. Nobody has ever canned food at their house."

Dean: "Well even the ones that have, like our children, they don't always slow down enough to do something like that. It's easier, the fast paced life they live, it's easier just to buy it."

Polly also laments that children today are not learning techniques for self-sufficient food production.

"I know of students here in my school that I counsel and work with that still have a feeling that if it's homegrown, it might not taste as good, and it might not be as good as what they buy in the store. And I think somehow, you know, we've missed teaching our young people the need to grow vegetables, the need to preserve those things that they grow."

Practitioners who cited a lack of time for some people, blamed the perceived decline of home food on a generation that avoids hard work or relies on social welfare. "There's so many people anymore, they need a garden, but [the] sun's too hot or something; they won't put them out. Then they suffer for it in the winter," said David. When asked if people should start canning when the economy is weak, David responded emphatically, "Yes." Bridgette poked fun while explaining her grandchildren do not help her in the garden. "They get hot. And there are bugs. They get sweaty. Poor things." Phoebe shared a similar sentiment but also acknowledged, like Polly that younger generations lack the knowledge. When asked why more people do not garden and preserve Phoebe stated,

"I'll tell you why, the kids, people don't tend like they used to, you know. Kids are not raised up in that. They don't know how to do it. I've got children I know wouldn't do it. Don't know how to tend the garden. Some do. The younger ones don't. The sun's too hot, they're just lazy. [Laughs.] They all work [outside the home]."

Beatrice alluded to a connection between a decline in home food production and over-reliance upon social welfare benefits. When asked if it was common for people who lacked garden space to share with others so they can produce their own food she replied,

“Uh, there's an awful lot of people that don't garden. You know if you're sitting there getting your doctor bills paid, I'm sure you're aware of all the stuff that goes on, if you can get your doctor bills paid, food stamps, and all that stuff, you know, you sit back and watch TV. We've got a lot of people like that.”

For some of the practitioners interviewed, however, health problems of their own or a family member resulted in their reduced participation. When asked if she grows all her food herself Daisy replied,

“I used to, but I don't do it now...my back has bothered me so much that I'm not supposed to be bending over. And I'm supposed to stay out of the sun, so it kind of makes it difficult. Because gardening, you have to do it when you have to do it. Its one of those things, you just can't put it off or the weeds will take it. Or if you put it off and you don't hoe, then it rains and you can't get out. Its one of those things you really have to watch.”

Phoebe, who is taking care of her ill husband, has not preserved food in the last two years though she had grown and saved food every year of her life since she was a child. In her case, the work required to raise the amount of food they were accustomed to would be too much for one person who is also a primary caretaker.

## **Analysis**

These interviews illuminate the socio-cultural understandings and processes of food in two rural Eastern Kentucky counties, Wolfe and Lawrence, where subsistence gardening and home food preservation is common. These interviews offer insights into the motivations of home food preservation practitioners, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and thoughts on the future of the practice. First, when asked why they continue to preserve foods at

home, every practitioner responded they had always done so. This would allude to a desire to continue a practice considered a tradition. We could define “tradition” as “the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant”, or as Hobsbawm and Ranger called it, “invented tradition.” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, pp. 2). Becker’s (1998) exploration of tradition defines it as,

“a lingering of the past in the present, a touchstone with those who have gone before and have left behind some of what they held most important for later generations. In this sense, the experience of tradition is personal- a gift of valued skills, customs, or stories, for instance, to younger members of the community” (pp. 1).

These conceptualizations of tradition enable us to understand how home food preservation serves the practitioner’s desires to hold on to a practice that brings them enjoyment and evokes fond memories. Coupled with McEntee’s (2010) examination of the distinction between “contemporary” and a “traditional” localism amongst home food producers (pp. 796), these conceptualizations of tradition could be useful. Categorizing local food producers into “contemporary local” and “traditional local,” McEntee creates a distinction between a politically motivated local production and local food production that predates a local food movement discourses. These categories are parallel but sometimes overlapping (McEntee, 2010, pp. 786) though those “contemporary local” were driven primarily by a local foods discourse (critiquing industrial agriculture, health benefits of local, rekindling a sense of community, environmental benefits of local, and so on) while the “traditional local” were often driven by a desire to save money and uphold tradition. This study mirrors McEntee's findings in the sense that tradition is the primary motivation for rural home food preservation. By and large most rural Kentucky practitioners take pleasure in the continuation of a traditional food practice and

enjoy the self-sufficiency and work involved. Many believe they are saving money and enjoy sharing their foods with others who want or need it. However, most of these so-called traditional practitioners also believe society would be improved by everyone growing and preserving their own foods.

In other words, “traditional locals” articulate other local food movements concerns and ideas, though they do not use the same language as food movement activists and urban “foodies.” For instance, several practitioners stated they also prefer the taste of their home produced goods, sought to control the additives, or were skeptical of the cleanliness of the commercial food system. Three of the twenty practitioners voiced concerns that clearly aligned with those of a local food discourse yet all practitioners long, in some way, to enjoy the fruits of their labor and thrive from it on a local level. To frame this finding as traditional local versus contemporary local is too clear a delineation and ignores other reasons for preserving.

While practitioners lack an explicit local foods discourse, using words such as *food miles*, *community gardening*, *carbon footprints*, *food sovereignty*, or *localization*, their concerns nevertheless have political implications. One rural practitioner had a community canning kitchen exists in his basement to share with his neighbors; some community members share land with others who need it; and almost everyone shares the products of their gardens. In addition to this non-market driven, collectivist orientation, all rural gardeners and preservers also assume that home food production is superior to conventional agricultural food products. This points to a need to broaden the local foods discourse to include rural Kentucky gardeners who were “foodies” long before the term was coined to refer to urban, educated chefs and connoisseurs. This refines our understanding of political motivations and addressed McEntee’s self-stated limitation that only upper and middle class people tend to be concerned with local



foods discourses (McEntee, 2010, pp. 797). Additionally, these practices take place in areas that could be considered food deserts highlighting the need to include self-production as measures of food access.

The second major theme of these interviews highlighted the role of women, primarily mothers, in passing on the traditional knowledge of preservation practices. Women, traditionally bearing primary responsibility for food production and keepers of food knowledge the world over (Howard, 2003, pp. 4) have used home gardens as a way to “[transmit] knowledge across generations” (Howard, 2003, pp. 8). North American women have shared their food knowledge both within the family and within the community. South Carolina’s tomato canning clubs that began in 1910 promoted a message of “empowerment and social change” for young girls but eventually gave way to traditional gender roles after the Great Depression (Engelhardt, 2009, pp. 90-91). The turn of the century saw the industrialization of food production and an increased reliance upon science as “the home changed from a place of production to a place of consumption” (Nerad, 1999, pp. 4). During the Progressive Era home economics would become academized as the first home economics program was created for women at the University of California, Berkeley (Nerad, 1999, pp. 11). The focus on the science and sanitation of food ushered in food safety concerns and best practices for home food production (Nerad, 1999, pp. 33-36). These changes, coupled with increasing consumerism, led these female holders of food knowledge to alter their practices and increase consumption of store bought goods. Simultaneously, foodways like gardening and home canning were rejected as lower class acts while industrially canned, store bought foods were associated with middle and upper class status (Levenstein, 2003, pp. 201). Despite the push to purchase instead of produce foods, many women in the study counties have continued to pass down food

knowledge through oral traditions and participation as evidenced by all practitioners learning from their mothers or grandmothers and demonstrating to their own children how to preserve, even if the children do not continue the practices.

Third, the scientization of food production and influence of the industrial age is visible amongst some practitioners and could have impacts on food safety. Frank's basement community kitchen exhibits a high level of organization and a near Fordist approach to home production. When asked, Frank gave an exact tally of each vegetable he had canned or frozen in the previous year. Participant observation revealed an efficient assembly-line approach being used that included multiple pots of boiling corn being transferred to a cooling station, then cut at a cutting station, and finally bagged then frozen at the final work station. In contrast, David and Pauline's preservation practices are more relaxed, with less focus on exact cooking time and organization. If these practitioners were chefs, Frank would be weighing out ingredients on a digital scale while David and Pauline would be adding a pinch-of-this and pinch-of-that. Many of the practitioners rely on information from previous generations and rarely refer to USDA preservation guidelines. When asked, most all related that it is easy to tell if a HFP food has spoiled or "gone bad." This is noted by cloudiness, change in color of the food, bad smell, and popped seals. These foods are not eaten and no doubt, reduced the likelihood of illness. These more fluid approaches to home food preservation based largely on oral transmission of knowledge will certainly concern agricultural extension agents who have voiced concern in the past that food safety standards could be outdated or incorrect, leaving practitioners vulnerable to food borne illnesses (D'sa, et al., 2007, pp. 1). It seems the scientization of food production is revealed for many of the practitioners in a piece-meal fashion with preservers picking and choosing what influences and knowledge to incorporate with their traditional knowledge.

The final theme, the future of home food preservation, elicited mixed responses. Most of the practitioners lamented the future of home food preservation as a “dying art form,” while several people countered they believed difficult economic times would motivate people to take up the practice. Others who stated time constraints as a reason their children or grandchildren do not practice preserving foods surmised that they would start practicing with age and possibly retirement from their wage-earning jobs. Some practitioners blamed parents and a time-pressed generation for not sharing the knowledge they used to produce their own foods. Others held the belief that even given the opportunity; some people will never produce their own foods since they abuse the social welfare system. These comments could reflect an internalization of stereotypes that portray Appalachians as backward and “atavistic” (Billings, 1974, pp. 316) and explain poverty through cultural deficiencies. Family farms over generations have been “divided again and again to accommodate the increasing numbers of young men” seeking economic opportunities (Billings and Blee, 1995, pp. 262). This has impacted Central Appalachia’s potential for subsistence agriculture since many people in Eastern Kentucky might not own their own land or have space for gardens. Poverty, a long-standing challenge for many regions not just Appalachia, might also be impetus for change instead of a barrier- a “catalyst for folks to re-think their lives...to reconnect with nature” (hooks, 2009, pp. 31). With national concern over the economy and drug addiction impacting families, practitioners think home food preservation and home gardening could nourish communities if done correctly in the future. Time constraints today might pose more barriers for younger generations not practicing home food preservation. Kingsolver (2011) found that some towns perceive young adults as opting out of civic participation but in fact younger generations are absent simply because they are commuting longer distances, leaving little time to participate in their communities (pp. 131).

Attending college, more common today than in previous generations, particularly for women, could also explain the lack of preservation participation.

### **In Summary: A Call to Action**

Studying home food preservation practitioners offers a rewarding opportunity to examine local food systems, alternatives to the industrialized food system, and could possess important policy implications for the rural United States. This work demonstrates the allure of long-term home food production and strength in adherence to a traditional practice- all desired acts in an age that moves ever faster. The role of women in the generational transmission of knowledge demonstrates both the prevalence of female-centered foodways and also the oral nature of home production practices. Home food preservation's future was said to be a "dying art form" but practitioners also noted hope that younger generations might take up the practice during sharp economic declines and after retiring from wage-earning jobs. Increased participation in home food preservation classes at local extension offices signals this art form actually has a strong immediate future.

Research to be conducted in summer 2012 will examine the motivations and demographics of home food preservation practitioners and home gardeners in two urban Kentucky counties—Fayette and Jefferson, home to the cities of Lexington and Louisville. Further research could also shed light on the role of changing technology in reducing women's workload and time constraints. The canning this author can do today differs greatly than that of Depression-era women using open-fire methods. Despite time-saving innovations like electric pressure canners and air conditioning, modern practitioners experience time constraints from full-time jobs, education, and family responsibilities as well.

Findings from this research could strengthen the case for direct marketing sales of locally produced foods. The state of Kentucky has supported the sale of home produced goods

as entrepreneurial niche markets since the passage of legislation made direct sales legal in 2003. The Bath County agriculture extension office, in Eastern Kentucky, has a state of the art commercial kitchen that could be used to produce canned goods like jams and salsas. This sort of facility, coupled with resources like the Kentucky Small Business Development Center, offers business and marketing skills to those who want to turn their home production into a small business. Home food preservationists who certify their products may now sell their goods at local farmers markets, a move that strengthens local and regional economies.

In addition to contributing to the field of food knowledge and potential policy implications, this research also serves to document practices of traditional food preservation for future generations who lack this food knowledge and might not learn through oral generational transmission. Regrettably, several practitioners expressed concern they might pass away before getting to share the knowledge with family members. This creates space for action. In addition to documenting and sharing through film the practices of home food producers, the hands-on nature of home gardening and food preservation opens a door to mentoring relationships between traditional practitioners and those new to the practices. An approach based on mentoring partnerships might spark increased participation in food relocalization efforts such as individual and community gardening and could stoke increases in demands for community kitchens and business incubators. Connecting long-term, traditional practitioners with younger generations could additionally work to bridge urban/rural divides, generational gaps, and contribute to a stronger sense of community. In addition to potential business partnerships for value-added food production, a mentoring partnership could create lasting friendships. And those, like gardens, are always something worth tending.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Changing Foodscape, 2009-present**

The following article will examine the motivations of urban Kentucky home food preservation practitioners and home-gardeners. The counties of Jefferson and Fayette are located in the North Central and Central regions of Kentucky and are home to the two most populous cities in the state, Louisville and Lexington. The motivations driving these urban local food proponents reveals concerns with issues of politics and ethics, a sense of place, and environmental sustainability. As with the rural practitioners, musings on the future of home food preservation were also examined. Unlike the rural region of Kentucky, these urban food preservation practitioners are hopeful that more people will pick up and continue the practice of preserving. To put the following article into better perspective, it is important to discuss some changes in society that impacted the landscapes of food and health knowledge.

Between the first study of rural practitioners in 2009 and the second study of urban practitioners in 2013, much changed within the realm of food in the United States in a short time. Alternatives to our industrial food system like community supported agriculture and farmer's markets became more popular and what was once considered foodie lingo, like "local/organic, food miles, and eating in the foodshed" has filtered into everyday conversation for many people. Markets too have been changing. In 2013, there were 8,144 farmers markets across the United States, a 364% increase in registered farmers markets since 1994 when 1,755 farms were originally listed in the United States Department of Agriculture's national directory (USDA, Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing, 2013). According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, 12,548 farms marketed goods through Community Supported Agriculture, or a CSA (USDA, Census of Agriculture, 2007). CSAs are groups of individuals who pledge

support to local farmers by paying upfront to fund the growing season. In return, the shareholders receive regular baskets of the farmers' produce throughout the growing season. This method of sharing the costs and risks of local agriculture became popular in the 1980s in the United States and is said to have originated in Switzerland and Japan in the 1960s (USDA, Defining Community Supported Agriculture, 2013).

Within the state of Kentucky, the local foods movement has spurred the creation of businesses and non-profits to address distribution and access to local organic agriculture. Green B.E.A.N. Delivery began in 2009 with an 8-acre organic garden and delivery to the Greater Louisville and Southern Indiana area (Green BEAN, 2013). The owners, Beth Blessing and Matt Ewer wanted to bring healthy foods to people's doors by delivering a tote of fruits and vegetables that are produced largely by local farms, when the season allows (Campbell, 2012). In 2013, Green B.E.A.N. Delivery expanded into Lexington, 1.5 hours southeast of Louisville. In 2014, the Lexington Fayette Urban County Government hired a local foods coordinator to spearhead the local foods programs in Fayette County, while working with farmers in the surrounding counties and Eastern Kentucky.

During the same period of 2009-2013, national and local media have explored the issues of over-consuming highly processed foods as contributors to obesity and preventable diseases like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Grim predictions “suggest that by 2030, the United States will be 65 percent overweight and 165 million American adults will be obese” (Lustig, 2013, pp. 7). A 2012 four-part documentary by HBO and the Institute of Medicine titled, *The Weight of the Nation* (2013) explored the impacts of obesity in North America and the implications of a less processed diet compared to that of our current industrial food system. Similarly on a local level, the film *Well Fed: Nourishing our Children for a Lifetime* (2012) by filmmaker Laura Kreuger, and supported by Kentucky Education Television's Foundation for a

Healthy Kentucky grant, explored the state of Kentucky's increasing rates of obesity and preventable diseases among children, while offering local food initiatives as a possible solution (KET.org, 2013).

Diet, exercise, and food reforms have also been a large program initiative of First Lady Michelle Obama. In 2009 an organic garden was created on the South Lawn White House to promote the issue of healthy, sustainable foods and served as a kick-off for the 2010 White House's Let's Move campaign to encourage children to be more active and less sedentary. The campaign also included plans for school lunch reform that would have budgeted \$10 billion over 10 years to reform school lunches and offer fresh foods (Grier, 2010) The first-ever White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity and the Let's Move campaign made the connection between increases in childhood obesity over the last 30 years, poor nutrition and increased access to processed foods, food labeling, and social changes that have made us a more sedentary society as a whole (White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, 2010).

We have witnessed the promotion of local food economies as a solution to these national and local concerns of obesity and over-reliance on processed foods. Simultaneously, the socioeconomic barriers to fresh foods have come to light. Economic insecurities have forced those wanting to include more local and organic foods to embrace self-sufficiency as a means to provide that which they cannot afford to buy. Will Allen, a farmer, speaker, and author of The Good Food Revolution (2012) rose to prominence for his urban agriculture in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Since 1993, Allen's organization Growing Power has formed community partnerships and taught gardening to community members all over the US (Growing Power.com, 2013). Likewise, new farmers are trying to make small scale food production profitable. A generation of college graduates are interested in reconnecting with nature while



turning local food production into their careers. From 2005 to 2008, enrollment in undergraduate agriculture programs increased by 21% (Mercer, 2009). This does not necessarily mean all students enrolled in agriculture programs will operate organic farms locally—or even graduate and pursue agricultural careers for that matter—but the shift does indicate a sea-change in shifting attitudes toward agriculture when taken together with aforementioned trends. “Beginning farmers,” those who have operated a farm or ranch for fewer than 10 years (USDA, Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loans, 2013) are enticed to replace the aging population of North American farmers whose average age is 60+ years (USDA, Census of Agriculture, 2007) by loans and incentives in the new farm bill. Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsak announced a MicroLoan Program for Beginner Farmers that would provide loans for up to \$35,000 to new farmers to help alleviate issues faced by young farmers- high costs for start-ups and prohibitive land costs (Vilsak, 2013).

In summary, farmers markets and CSAs have grown, national policies have been directed at reforming health and wellness, and most health experts increasingly promote a diet of fresh, organic foods over conventional, highly processed foods. The food landscape has experienced an awareness that the health of our country is in trouble, while exploring local food production as a way to reconnect us with healthier, more sustainable options.

### **Community Experts and the University**

While writing the first article of findings from the rural Kentucky interviews, I organized a panel discussion with a few of the food preservation experts from Wolfe and Lawrence Counties in my study. I was working at the UK Appalachian Center at the time and Dr. Ann Kingsolver, the Director, supported the effort by including the panel in the Center's Appalachian Forum series. Like Dr. Kingsolver, I agree that universities could do a better job of

showcasing the local expertise of those in their region. Too often, we showcase speakers from other states and countries to the exclusion of our neighbors living an hour and a half away. Analyzing research can be an isolating affair. Much of the work takes place while alone in an office, researcher tethered to a computer transcribing, reading, and writing. It is a completely different feeling to conduct the research. Interviewing people and learning the motivations of their practice is equally hard work, but so much more fulfilling. I love the interaction, the observation, and the sense of community. This project made me realize that so many individuals are doing extraordinary things. They possess a level of lived knowledge not found in books or articles. In light of this, it was important to showcase that knowledge and share it with the community.

The forum consisted of three panelists, chosen for their lively personalities and interest in public speaking, and one graduate student who had just completed her master's thesis on food preservation safety. I created a short film from the interviews I had conducted and the forum was a great opportunity to screen it. To my surprise, all three of the local experts brought jars of their canned food to share with the audience. The format of the panel was informal and conversational, like our interviews had been. Audience members grew comfortable asking questions during the forum because of this. The sharing of the food, as could be expected, brought everyone together at the end. Everyone enjoyed sharing stories, so much so, we all skipped the reception back at the Appalachian Center and continued our conversations where we were. The night was special for me and I believe it was also special for those panelists who took the time to travel to Lexington, where we all wanted to hear what they had to say. And eat what they brought to share.

## Article 2

### **Doing “good work”: Issues of Politics, Race and Place, and Sustainability Among Urban Home Food Preservationists and Home-Gardeners in Kentucky**

#### **Abstract**

From 2009 to 2013 this researcher conducted in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation in four Kentucky counties to explore motivations for home gardening and home food preservation. This work focuses primarily on findings from two urban Kentucky counties—Fayette and Jefferson—and compares findings to those from previous rural counties. Home food preservation is often coupled with home gardening and includes the methods of canning, freezing, drying, burying, cellaring, pickling, and curing. I used snowball and purposive sampling in order to achieve a representative sample for race and class in Fayette and Jefferson counties. Findings include motivations by political and ethical impetus for preserving/gardening, a complex sense of place—particularly regarding African American farmers, and concerns for environmental sustainability driving motivations to support local food production. I have used a Habermasian framework to analyze the findings that indicate resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld by conventional industrial agriculture production.

#### **Introduction**

Most food in the United States is cheap and accessible all hours of the day. The National Center for Health Statistics reports that from 2007-2010, the average North American consumed fast food as 11.3% of their daily caloric intake (Fryar, 2013, pp. 1) and a recent Gallup poll revealed that 8 in 10 Americans reported eating fast food at least once a month (Dugan, 2013). This low cost access to *ultra-processed foods*—foods that are “ready-to-consume, entirely or mostly made from industrial ingredients and additives...” (Monteirol, et al., 2013, pp. 14) is increasingly becoming the dominant type of food in most industrialized countries (Ibid, pp. 25). Yet, home food preservation and home gardening practices are on the rise according to increased interest and participation in food preservation classes (Pratt, 2008) and increases in “recession gardens” (Associated Press, 2009). Ball canning jars saw a 20% increase in volume of sales in 2012 and the company predicted even more future growth due to increased

popularity in DIY, or do-it-yourself, trends (Parekh, 2013). Growing a home garden and practicing home food preservation takes a considerable amount of time, money, and energy. Why then, are these practices on the rise in the US and what motivates those conducting these practices?

This qualitative study of home food preservation practitioners addresses these questions while adding to an understudied segment of food and agriculture literature. When it comes to food scholarship, it seems that home food preservation has been neglected. A review of food access measures in food desert literature revealed markers for things like access to stores, income, race/ethnicity, food store density, cost, and location but not the ability to conduct home food preservation or procure food for oneself through a home garden (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010). We create a limited picture of food landscapes when we omit self-provisioning and the desire to grow and preserve one's food at home. This work fills that gap in the literature while offering a regional comparison between urban and rural communities in East and Central Kentucky.

## **Literature**

There is still little sociological research on home food preservation though scholarly attention to this topic increased somewhat since this research began in 2009. Most research has focused primarily as self-provisioning for economic need and its linkages to community-building. Home gardens and its complimentary practice, home food preservation, have been discussed as a way to make ends meet in rural areas of Kentucky and the Ozarks (Halperin, 1990, pp. 131; Campbell, 2010, pp. 10) and as a skill the builds community engagement (McEntee, 2010, pp. 797; Click and Ridberg, 2010, pp. 310). Nutritionally vulnerable elderly residents were found to conduct home gardening and food preservation in rural areas to supplement their diet and be independent (Quandt, Popyach, & DeWalt, 1994, pp.195).

The use of gardens and home food preservation in relation to food deserts was a second common topic for inquiry. One study suggested the practices are a partial solution to rural food deserts (Morton & Blanchard, 2007, pp. 1). Yet, many food preservation studies are flawed by faulty assumptions or selective focus. For example, research on food deserts has not sufficiently examined the role home gardening and preservation can play in reducing food deserts. A study testing the link between food deserts and obesity examined six low-income rural families with children enrolled in Medicaid in Maine found the use of freezing surplus food in a “deep freezer” like hunted meat, fish, berries, fiddleheads, and bulk food items on sale was an important way families made ends meet and consume a healthier diet (Yousefian, 2011, pp. 5). This work is problematic because nothing guarantees the food stored using a deep freezer will be healthy or even produced from home gardening. Lucan, et al, (2012) points this out in reply to Hartley, et al. (2011) and Yousefian, et al. (2011) who asserted that the term food deserts does not accurately apply to rural families because many use deep freezers and accept that driving vast distances to stores is a part of rural life. Low-income families, whether rural or urban, likely have little space for a deep freezer with which to store preserved foods, particularly if living in an apartment or mobile home. It is also inaccurate to assume that all rural residents have access to a personal vehicle.

### **The Lifeworld and Food**

Using a Habermasian analysis, Black argued that Kentuckians are not marginal to, but are instead “center stage” in the national drama of scrutinizing the commercial food system (Black, 2010, pp. 123). Using Habermas, as Black does, to discuss the motivations of home gardeners and home food preservation practitioners offers us tools to approach this study from a phenomenological perspective, meaning that we will explore how people come to think about their actions, a perfect model of analysis for questions of motivation. Like Black, I will employ

a Habermasian framework to investigate the motivations of home gardeners and food preservers. This work differs from Black's work, however, in that her main contention is that Kentucky is not peripheral to the larger local food movements, but is in fact central to it. My work takes a step back to examine the larger food landscape picture in rural and urban Kentucky to see what the motivations for home-gardening and home food preservation are and delves into the nuances of Habermas' lifeworld as they are present in these rural and urban communities.

Habermas uses key concepts to explain his theory of communicative action which in itself provides the context for understanding why people act as they do. One of these concepts is the lifeworld. The lifeworld, as defined by Habermas, is the taken-for-granted universe of existence that includes one's values, ethics, behaviors, and actions (Habermas, 1984, pp. 13). These are taken for granted because they develop over time through face-to-face interactions and carry assumptions about what societies value. “Communality rests, to be sure, on consensual knowledge, on a cultural stock of knowledge that members share” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 131). The lifeworld is actually comprised of three worlds—the objective, the social, and the subjective. The coordinated, strategic process of addressing the objective, subjective, and social simultaneously is *communicative action*—the goal for Habermas. Through the concept of communicative action, Habermas offered us with the ability to balance the rationality and instrumentalization of the *system* with the *lifeworld*, reducing alienation that comes with modernity through communicating in ways that reach consensus and support democracy.

The lifeworld can be colonized by certain spheres of society (the *system*), which exert more influence upon the whole. “The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible a heightening of systemic complexity, which becomes so hypertrophied that it unleashes system imperatives that burst the capacity of the lifeworld they instrumentalize” (Habermas, 1987, pp.

155.) For example, the conventional industrial food system can be understood as a colonizer of the lifeworld. It allows for high levels of control, predictability, and reproducibility, which guarantee its success and availability at stores across the nation. Pesticides and herbicides are readily available in our society and are marketed directly to farmers and home-gardeners alike. The relative inexpensive cost of these chemical inputs contrasts drastically to many organic pesticides and herbicides which might be more difficult to find, particularly in small towns. In this way, the industrial agriculture system colonizes the lifeworld, as it leaves little other choice for consumers. It reduces food production to an instrumental system of machine-like parts and the individuals involved in food production, to people with little decision-making power or choices. The conventional industrial food model operates like a well-oiled machine and in this way, represents Habermas' *system*. It is currently the dominant, taken-for-granted form of food production for most of North America and the companies that profit from it use their considerable power and resources to keep it the dominant form. A medium of instrumental logic—money—“steer[s] a social intercourse that has largely been disconnected from norms and values.. and [has] become independent of their moral political foundations” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 154). Using money as a way to maintain hegemony, the systematic nature of industrial agriculture has emerged in modern society as the dominant form of food production. For these reasons, throughout this work I will refer to the conventional industrial food system as *the system*, meaning it has colonized the lifeworld regarding food.

Unlike the conventional industrial food system, a local food system functions less systematically, exhorting far less control, predictability, and reproducibility of scale. Just ask anyone who has ever participated in a community supported agriculture venture that experienced a year of bitter cold in spring or severe drought in summer. A conventional industrial food system could simply import food from another region when uncontrollable

weather results in crop failure. By its very nature a local food system is not reproducible at the scale required to transport it nationally, nor do the people who create it *choose* it to be. It deliberately sets itself apart from the conventional industrial food system. It challenges the global industrial food system by focusing on issues of justice through local production (Allen, 2008; Norberg-Hodge, Merrifield & Gorelick 2002; Lyson & Guptil, 2004), the consolidation of agribusiness corporations within the free market system, (Lyson & Guptill, 2004; Heffernan, Hendrickson, & Gronski, 1999), and by creating reflexive localism (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). It addresses the objective, the social, and the subjective worlds; it strives for balance of the instrumentality required of food production with tradition and community aspects of local food production. It represents a lifeworld where the instrumentality of *the system* is balanced through communicative action. Participants of local food systems balance the system with the lifeworld through concerted efforts to resist colonization. These efforts include creating spaces for discussing the system, acting to change the system, and calling for others to change the system.

For this work, a “local foods terminology” means the use of concepts like *food miles*, *ecological footprint*, *sustainable agriculture*, *CSAs*, *food deserts*, or *environmental impacts*, in the discussion of issues like methods of production (local food production versus conventional production) and styles of production (organic, non-GMO, fair labor/fair trade). This terminology is commonly associated with sustainable agriculture and local food movement literature (Blanchard & Lyson 2006; Morton & Blanchard, 2007; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010; Hubley, 2011). When gardeners employ the *local foods terminology*, they are engaging in communicative action because, in doing so, they redefine and reclaim the lifeworld from the system of conventional agriculture. Utilizing a Habermassian



framework to analyze these findings, I will now discuss the methods and data that form the empirical basis of this analysis.

## **Methods**

I conducted twenty semi-structured interviews (ten in each county) lasting between 30 minutes to an hour, with most lasting over one hour, with home food preservation practitioners and home gardeners in Fayette and Jefferson Counties from Summer 2012 to Fall 2013.

Interviews were recorded with both audio and video. I also took photographs in order to create a “folk ethnography” of the observable public life- the home gardens and preservation procedures of participants (Harper, 2005, pp. 759). I asked the urban practitioners the same questions as those in rural Kentucky and employed an informal, conversational tone. Analysis consisted of reviewing notes and coding for themes. I noted words representing a “local foods terminology.” I then transcribed audio files in segments surrounding those themes and quotes that best illuminated the themes. The following questions guided the urban interviews, just as I used it to guide the rural interviews conducted in 2009.

**Table 3.1, Questions Guiding In-depth Interviews**

What are the reasons for conducting home food preservation?
What foods are commonly preserved?
What length of time has the practitioner preserved foods at home?
Where did practitioners gain their preservation knowledge?
What is the role of home food preservation in the formation and maintenance of community relationships?
How long have participants been and intend to be a practitioner?
How do practitioners situate themselves in the local and global food systems?
How are practitioners engaging in informal exchanges or reciprocal economies?
What are the relations of gender in the process of home food preservation?
What are the economic factors surrounding the practitioner's use of home food preservation?
What preservation techniques are used?

**Findings from Qualitative Interviews**

The median age of urban practitioners was 42 years, whereas the median age of practitioners in the aforementioned rural study was 62 years of age. Nine of the twenty participants were under the age of 40. The oldest participant was 75 while the youngest was 26. Of the twenty interview participants, two were currently students in graduate degree programs. Five participants had recently graduated from college within the last four years. Thirteen of the twenty were either educated at the undergraduate or graduate level in local food and subsistence issues, worked directly within the field of food studies, or were students of the social sciences. Five were retired from various jobs—teaching (2), health administration (1), agriculture extension (1), and construction (1). Two were work-at-home mothers who referred to themselves as homesteaders. Two participants identified as African American and 18 identified as white. The sample consisted of sixteen women and four men, two of whom I interviewed

alongside their wives or domestic partners. Six of the participants had backyard chickens and one was planning to start keeping chickens within the next year. These participants were also active in their communities—one participant is the progenitor of an orchard project where he encourages and teaches others how to have at least one fruit tree in their yards, one works for a low-income food organization, one has created food curriculum for a local high school, one manages a community garden at his church, and one person worked for a small farm advocacy organization.

Three major themes were present in all twenty interviews—being motivated by political and ethical stances against “the system,” being concerned with environmental sustainability in agriculture, and experiencing a connection to place. The participants’ predictions about the future of home food preservation was largely optimistic, with many saying they think the practice will gain popularity as more people demand changes within the system. I will first address these findings, then follow up with an analysis.

### *Politics and Ethics*

“There's a whole system of apathy, when you look at voter turnouts and see that 10% or less are going to the polls, when you see the amount of entertainment we spend money on and that we utilize on a daily and weekly basis, it's really mind-boggling. Really, our society is about being entertained and not thinking and not processing these things. We go from one event to the next event, we don't process it, we hardly enjoy it, we don't relish it, we don't cherish it- I think it's all wrapped up together. We've shut off our minds and let things go buy us. We're not really living. We're just going along with whatever flow seems to be set before us. Those of us who see something different really have to fight that business and that flow. I don't think it's a movement; I think it's just a few of us who've chosen to be listeners and engage our minds.”

-Sally, Lexington

Sally connected the state of modern society to her desire to slow down and grow her own food and preserve it. She and her family strive to live differently than others whom she perceives to not be appreciating the small things in life; those who are “not really living.”

Nineteen of twenty urban practitioners shared sentiments similar to Sally. They were motivated by a sense of changing the food system, which they asserted to be problematic in various ways. Most clearly, they discussed food in terms of ethics and politics. The “right” sort of system of food production or the “best” foods were seen to be produced either by oneself or on a local farm, typically through organic production methods. Four of these politically-motivated practitioners described their motivations in ways that also referenced their religious beliefs and a social justice-oriented impetus for self-sufficiency, the others’ did not mention a specific religious belief driving their social justice stances. Chelsea explained the inclusiveness she and her family strive for by sharing their produce with their neighbors in a low-income Lexington neighborhood,

“I think we’re longing for meaning. That’s our commitment here- living in a transitional neighborhood that is diversifying- it should be for the poor too. They shouldn’t be left behind. They have so much to offer...[I]t’s the low income elderly women who could lead the revolution.”

Another practitioner, Kim explained why she and her husband grow food and their understanding of what their religion expects of them,

“We definitely have more of a stewardship mentality- caring for and helping to preserve the goodness of things rather than adding to what might be bad or ugly about what things have become, but to preserve goodness and to restore goodness... God created us to be co-creators with Him, to have the ability to create.”

Sally also saw her family's work as an extension of God's love, “Thinking about the Bible and how in the beginning God asked us to care for the animals and look after things. Being part of caring for the Earth and animals and children, helps us understand we're being cared for by a God that loves us. ”

While some practitioners are motivated to political change by their religious ethics, others see their actions to change the system through supporting local agriculture from an

academic or sociocultural perspective. Erin stated, “I think there is definitely a movement. And part of that is Michael Pollan's book and there's been a lot of documentaries about food, where it comes from.” Jacob points to his understanding of Wendell Berry as explanation for seeing food as a political act,

“It has become a question of ethics for us, mostly centered from the man that most folks I know have read, Wendell Berry, about those kind of questions. What we eat is a political act. It's a social act, it's an economic act, it's a theological or spiritual act and all of that from having this thing that you sit down and put in your mouth...”

Alice, a former assistant manager of a farmer's market shared a similar entry point, “I studied Geography and Political Science and somehow read Wendell Berry and was interested in food and farm issues...Everything's political.” Wendell Berry was a common source of inspiration for the majority of urban home food preservation practitioners. The Kentucky author, food and farm activist, and advocate of community-building local food systems was often quoted. (Berry's influence will be discussed in more detail in the analysis). Erin explained how Wendell Berry's notion of “good work” became denigrated over time and how the notion is something worth fighting against,

“Wendell Berry has this whole series of essays on the value of work and what kind of work is considered valuable, good work. In the modern era, farming, growing your own food and spending all that time in the kitchen isn't worthwhile. That isn't “good work,” that isn't worthwhile work. That's what poor people do. That's what uneducated, ignorant, country bumpkins do and if you have any time, any sense, any money you don't do that, is basically what he was saying about how those notions changed over time. You have to say, 'yes, it is worth your time.’”

Meredith became involved in gardening and home food preservation after seeing a flier for a local food organization in Louisville's West End. In addition to her other job, she works with the organization's farmers and member networks. Being involved in these ways and taking part in their food justice workshops have invigorated Meredith because they address issues that have concerned her over the years. She thinks the high number of fast food restaurants in her

neighborhood and lack of fresh foods can be counteracted if people grow their own foods and teach younger generations that quality of food matters.

“To me there is not enough parental involvement in teaching young people about how they can grow their own and that you don't have to go to the McDonalds and the Burger Kings and Dairy Queens. Every now and then it's okay to go there, but you're going to get your nutrition, your weight will stay down, you don't have junior diabetes, by a mom or a dad or even a big sister cooking that home meal. Our parents, very seldom did [they take us] out to eat. We had three home-cooked meals everyday... [Today] it's easier to run through the McDonald's drive through and go to KFC than to cook.”

This sentiment was echoed by nearly all practitioners- this modern, time-pressed society is the same one that offers fast-food and highly processed convenience foods that we have all come to rely upon in lieu of the do-it-yourself home gardens and food preservation. “I think there are a lot of people who are looking for a better way of doing things. There is dissatisfaction- with the food system, dissatisfaction with their jobs, and thinking about the American Dream in general,” said Erin. Though having excessive amounts of fast food restaurants in one's community and a lack of fresh foods is often an indicator of a food desert, communities with more access do not necessarily use their resources wisely. They too need role models. Eloise, who lives in an upper middle class neighborhood explained,

“We just ran around like crazy when I was a kid, we didn't have any schedules and now everybody has their soccer and music lessons- all that's great but they're just running from place to place. So I can easily see how you get into the habit of using a drive-through. Yeah, making your own jam or tomato sauce is time consuming. So I think kids don't have any role models. They've never tasted it.”

These quotes represent the overall consensus of the twenty urban practitioners toward a political/ethical impetus for conducting home food preservation. Practitioners were motivated by a sense of religious duty, an understanding of the system's negative externalities to their health, and a feeling of being alienated from nature. Eighteen of twenty practitioners

specifically discussed at length how the system was problematic because it perpetuates a time-pressed society. The industrially processed convenience foods are easier to consume of home cooked or slow cooked meals, and this in turn, allows us to live even more time-pressed lives. Generally, the practitioners saw their actions to grow and preserve their own foods as doing “good work” to improve the system and their health.

### *Place*

“I’m a geographer by training so I really loved learning about places and how people interact with them... I think [it’s] really special that people are still interacting over food and buying and selling food direct from farmers in the place that its always happened.”  
Alice, Lexington

*Place* was a reoccurring theme amongst the practitioners and was discussed in terms of its complexities and as a tool for achieving a good life. One African American study participant practices his traditional food knowledge by gardening and preserving despite living in an urban setting. Through our discussion it became clear that returning to the land for African American farmers holds particular meaning that does not apply to white farmers. Slavery, then institutional racism has prevented Black farmers from acquiring land and farm subsidies over the years. Agriculture is a complex issue for African Americans because of this. Others who grew up in rural areas have returned to their roots symbolically by continuing a practice learned in their youth. They are now living in urban areas but returning to their agrarian roots through gardening, preserving, and getting their communities involved. Place is also discussed in connection to conceptions of a successful, “good life.” Many urban gardeners seek to live what they consider a better life by establishing a connection with the rural, if only through the practices of home gardening and preserving.

Merle, a graduate student in Lexington who grew up on a farm in rural North Carolina, discusses how older generation African Americans view living in rural areas. He explained the

complicated linkages between place and shifting aspirations,

“Many black families had no other choice but to grow their own food because they could not afford it. It was an economic factor for many of the families. However, they told their children, 'this is not how you want to live' although it was good enough for them. If you listen to the stories of many urban blacks that come from rural areas they will say, 'I was raised on a farm' or 'I grew up in the tobacco field' – these are older blacks, 45-50+ years old that will say, 'I remember how tough it was, working in those fields. Youth today don't know about hard work.' Then they will end that conversation not by saying, 'it taught me a strong work ethic, to persevere, how to manage my money because I started working when I was young'- they will say instead, 'working in those fields is what motivated me to get away from the country, and to never go back.'”

Merle, one of two African American participants in the study shared the sentiments of Sally, Kim, Erin, and others regarding resistance of the system's colonization of the lifeworld as mentioned earlier, but also added a political complexity to the understanding of place—the aspects of race and class.

“Its complex, it's very complex. I personally believe black people have a connection with the land. But I think that with the institution of slavery, with discrimination and racist policies that have been instituted through at the state and even federal level, the USDA, it has tainted many African American or black families toward land, toward food production, toward the natural environment. However, again, adding to the complexity here, there is an ignorance, a lack of knowledge of the history of black American's connection to the land. Particularly during reconstruction when many black Americans built a strong middle class based off agriculture-cotton production in particular in the south that was a base for many of the urban black businesses, particularly the banks, as well as, grocery stores.”

This quote highlights how rural agriculture enabled the growth of the black middle classes by providing the capital for economic institutions and stores. Merle illustrates the gray areas in the African American lifeworld of rurality and agriculture by connecting racist exploitation and the formation of the black middle class in one thought. As someone who understands the complex relationship African Americans have with the land and food production, Merle works to educate youth in his community. He runs a community garden at his local church that encourages young, African American boys to learn gardening and grow food



on the property. The pre-teens and teens help with cultivation and have learned how to produce salsa from the vegetables they grew. With help from the agriculture extension office they canned it in glass jars and sold some of them. Merle described the reluctance of some younger African Americans toward growing food, “Today, some youth they first say, 'that's what the slaves did, these are not slavery times, I'm not cheap labor.' However, this comes from not knowing the history and a significant portion of the story of the black experience of agriculture and land and food production.” Over time, Merle says they change their minds, especially after watching the plants they have tended grow and produce fruits. They realize they can reshape the lifeworld of food to be more representative of their own experiences.

Another way participants discussed their connection to place is through the reclaiming of lost skills by those who moved to urban areas from rural backgrounds. Many associated rural life with poverty, a lack of employment, or the hard manual labor of agriculture. Eloise grew up in rural Oklahoma but now lives in Louisville. While she enjoys living in Louisville, she associates modern urban society with a disconnection from nature and discusses how her generation lost the skills of growing food and preserving “So many people my age... who grew up in a small town in Oklahoma, they came to Louisville or Lexington and didn't go back to the rural area.” Alice spoke of her grandmother, who was raised with an agrarian background in East Kentucky, but did not pass her knowledge on to her grandchildren.

“My grandma who grew up with that [gardening and preserving] prefers just being able to buy it at the store. Maybe it's easier... She grew up with that culture but didn't really bring it with her. She left Morgan County when she was 20 and moved to Lexington, and worked in Frankfort and Lexington. I think in a way she tried to sort of leave her country roots for her city roots. At the same time, they love the kind of work I'm interested in because it's so similar to the things they grew up with.”

Holding onto rural roots is important for Stan, currently a high school teacher of food courses and sponsor of the environmental club. He grew up on a farm in Eastern Pennsylvania

and does not want to distance himself from his background. When he moved to Louisville, instead of living in an apartment, he bought a house in a working class neighborhood in Louisville so he could live off the land. Farming in the city allows Stan to practice his familiar skills but also feel close to his family,

“I always grew up with a garden- I grew up raising food. When I moved to Kentucky that was still there for me- I still wanted to do it. At the same time, as a young bachelor I wanted to not distance myself from other people and buy a couple acres and farm it. So I bought a house in Germantown. This was the neighborhood I could afford, so I jammed them both together. I have the garden and I've also raised rabbits and had them for food, and ducks and turkeys and chickens at various points. It's a piece of me. Growing food- it feels natural. Feels like something I should be doing and feels like something I can do to connect with my family.”

Urban farming seems to offer an opportunity to have the amenities of urban life, including a larger job market, while also maintaining the dream of a small homestead. Brittany grew up in semi-urban Jefferson County but now lives in Lexington close to where her husband is a university professor. She and her family were in the process of buying a new home in hopes of creating a homestead with subsistence gardens, chickens, a goat, and food preservation.

“We've drawn up huge garden plans for the new house and that's part of what it means to live sustainably. We are installing rainwater-harvesting barrels so we can water all of our gardens with rain water. Thinking about how to install a gray water system so our bath and sink water go back out in to the landscape as opposed to the wastewater stream. And thinking about planting lots of natives for local wildlife to enjoy because there are a few too many lawns in this city (laughs). We got chickens so we can have eggs from our own backyard, that's exciting. We're excited about selling or gifting extra eggs to friends and family.”

Sally and her family, who also consider themselves to be homesteaders, moved from downtown Lexington to a home in a more rural part of Lexington still considered part of the urban corridor. Just a short drive from downtown in an area on the edge of development, their home sits on a wooded lot near a creek. When asked why they moved there Sarah replied, “Our third child needs to run and she needs space. She couldn't have the freedom to do that. We had chickens downtown and were doing front yard gardening, but the combination of her needing

space and us feeling like we needed to expand a bit worked out well.” Sally grew up in South Dakota surrounded by farms and had freedom as a child that she wants her own children to experience. Their semi-rural home place in the city allows them to not only produce food and live off their land, but also gives their children freedom to play in the creek and even have their own garden plots—something they could not have experienced downtown.

Belinda, drawing from Wendell Berry like so many in this study, speaks of the importance of place as one reason why she gardens and preserves food. She has a chicken coop in her urban backyard in Louisville and a sizeable yard to grow her garden,

“A sense of place—it’s really important. You know, I like to read Wendell Berry, of course, I’m from Kentucky (laughs), and I’m really into this type of stuff, but so much of what he writes is all about sense of place. Not having to go off and go somewhere else to get meaning out of life. Being able to create meaning where you live and the people who are around you. Your town. Your city. That’s become more important to me in the past few years- it’s something I want to continue. I feel it’s something a lot of people lose sight of.”

Belinda and others like Brittany, and Sally are creating their own sense of place- a home where they feel more self-sufficient. They are carving out a space for themselves and their families, modeled on the familial knowledge brought with them from the rural to the urban. Others, like Eloise, Merle, and Stan grew up in rural areas but now find themselves in urban areas working the land with a deep connection to home and to meaningful parts of their complicated pasts. As with Merle, we see how racism and the history of slavery makes the connection to place complex for many African American families and imbues acts of resisting the system with more nuance.

## *Environmental Sustainability*

“Local food, eating within your food shed, is within about 100 miles. For the most part, you try to get food that is produced locally so that everything you're consuming are resources from that area. Most American vegetables come from the Central Valley [California], which is a really dry place. They import water from outside of the watershed, they turn it into a tomato, then they export the tomato. So really, all they're exporting is water. They basically sold water that they took from someone else to another place. If you're eating local, you're making do with the water resources you have, the soil and temperature you have. So what you do has a direct impact. To me, eating local is accounting for what the land can actually support. That goes into the larger sustainability issue of what can you do that can be maintained for the next generation and the next and the next? How can you create a system that is resilient and able to respond to changes?” Erin, Lexington

Erin, who worked for a non-profit environmental organization at the time, shares a sentiment that is common amongst the urban practitioners. She is concerned that the alternative to home gardening or local food systems is continued reliance upon the system. She thinks the system negatively impacts the environment and strains natural resources. Peggy, a former home economist, current CSA member, and host of an online radio local food talk show, discusses her concerns of the systems reliance upon pesticides as a reason for growing her own foods,

“I am terribly, terribly distressed about the amounts of pesticides, herbicides, hormones—all of the nasty chemicals that are put on food of all kinds. Whether its meat or vegetables, I think we are poisoning our climate, I think we are poisoning ourselves. There was a point at which I thought, 'I cannot eat that poison food anymore'... at a certain point I started looking for organic produce and joined my first CSA between 20-30 years ago.”

Peggy said, when it comes to choosing between local or organic, she would choose local foods because shifting away from the conventional system sends a message that the system needs to change and become more environmentally sustainable.

Deborah grew up in North Carolina and was a social worker for many years. She currently works as a web designer in Louisville. She grew up gardening and says her environmental concerns stem from the way she was raised,

“My family lived in a way that was respectful towards things and not destructive. We were taught to take care of our toys- to be respectful of things and make them last. I've been exposed to more and more reasons to live that way. Now there's the concern about climate change and mountaintop removal and destruction of too many green spaces- air quality, water quality, etc.- I've learned more and more about how the list goes into my adult life.”

Due to her concerns about pollution Deborah refuses to use pesticides and herbicides by following the recommendations of her horticulturalist sister. She plants marigolds and other natural repellants in her garden to keep pests away. She has also organized viewings of the popular documentary, *Food Inc.* (2009) with help from Community Farm Alliance because she thinks it is important for her neighbors to learn about the negative impacts of the system depicted in the film. Brittany also sees her family's practices as being environmentally sustainable, “For us, in this time and space in our lives, sustainability is growing what we can in a small, urban, backyard garden. Buying a lot of our food locally, directly from farmers.” Brittany says their oldest daughter loves helping preserve food by running the food processor and peeling apples. Brittany hopes her daughter will possess this excitement about food preservation and gardening the rest of her life. “It's our hope that we're raising independently minded, excited about sustainability and doing-the-good-work kind of kids. We'll see. They could turn out completely different though, right? (Laughs).”

Chelsea said her family's awareness of environmental issues stems from her husband's experience growing up in Australia and experiencing extreme drought. Due to a heightened awareness of water scarcity, they do not have a clothes dryer but instead hang-dry their clothes and conserve energy in their home. Chelsea states,

“We 100% never use chemicals. We do composting, mulching, rain barrels for the water. The more you approach it with an ecological worldview- like this is all connected- 90% of the insects out there are beneficial, I'm not about to do anything to harm them. My flourishing is tied to their flourishing.”

Like Chelsea, Deborah, Brittany, and Erin, nineteen of twenty urban practitioners were concerned with a broad range of topics related to environmental sustainability. The practitioners were passionate about the impact their actions could have to improve the environment. They worry about the system, which sells water via produce from watersheds far away. They are concerned about pesticides and chemicals in the environment and they strive to decrease their destructive behaviors in general. Practitioners saw growing and preserving their own foods as ways to improve upon what they see as negative externalities from the system.

### ***Musings on the Future of Home Food Preservation***

This researcher asked every practitioner what s/he thought the future of home food preservation holds. In general, urban practitioners were more hopeful than rural practitioners about the future of the practice. Unlike the majority of rural Kentuckians, the urban dwellers think home gardening and food preservation is on the rise. Alice points to both the number of books on canning and the increase in organizations as an indicator, “There are so many books now and they're done so beautifully, with great pictures so it makes it look really beautiful and organic and fun. There are so many organizations that want to be that resource for people.” Jacob sees it as a necessity, “I hope folks get into it, hope they keep getting into it. It’s a necessary step because we don't live in a tropical climate where you can pretty much grow things year round.” Only two of twenty practitioners, who also happened to be the eldest in the study, had a dismal outlook on the future of the practice. When asked if future generations are likely to be interested in home food preservation, Dorothy points to her family as an indicator, “I don't know, I really don't. Just judging by my own children and grandchildren, I kind of doubt it. I think they'd lose a lot if they didn't have that interaction with the soil.” Taking a bleaker perspective on the matter is Hank,

“I have a rather grim outlook on our planetary health and ability to sustain this many people. I don't think we can do it. I say we'll see some big impacts within the next decade of a huge part of the world's population disappearing. Too many people, climate change, too little fresh water, overuse of resources, overfishing of the oceans, salinization of our farmlands from irrigation, you name it. There's just too much and we're going to hit the wall. I hope I'm wrong. Don't think I am, but I hope I'm wrong. I'll sit around and eat my dried apples and pears (laughs).”

The majority of urban practitioners, like Meredith, find hope in the younger generations who she says have the ability to change things for the better. Meredith says that if home food preservation is made to be fun, younger people get on board. When they reconnect to gardening, obesity related to a sedentary life not only decreases, but children reconnect with nature, “If you get them when they're young, 9 or 10 years old, kids are amazing. They love stuff like that...You have to always keep them interested and be on their level and not above their level. You have to think like they think.”

### **Analysis**

The question of what motivates urban practitioners to practice home food preservation in this day and age, yielded similar responses as those in rural Kentucky. They all agreed that home gardening and home food preservation was a meaningful way to provide healthy foods and control their exposures to chemicals and contaminants. They also agreed that home-grown and preserved foods taste better and took pride in providing for themselves. They shared the belief that producing one's food is time-consuming and often hard work, but they felt that overall, it was definitely worth it. The language used to discuss these motivations, however, relied far more on a local foods terminology for urban practitioners than for rural. The discussion of associating agriculture with slavery and the institutional racism that resulted in the

decrease of black farmers in North America was a critical point missing from previous interviews in rural Kentucky.

I found three major themes to be exceptionally pervasive in this study. First, the straightforward use of a local foods terminology was indicative of a politicized impetus. This was marked by religious beliefs, ideas on the ethics of food, and concerns of food justice centered around confronting the system. Secondly, a sense of place and the ability to have land and create a good life was commonly discussed. White practitioners linked the ability to produce their food through gardening and preserving to fond memories or hopes for the future. They lacked the complex relationship to the land many agrarian black Americans experienced in the Jim Crow south. Lastly, participants clearly articulated concerns for environmental sustainability and their resultant support for local, subsistence agriculture.

### ***Politics and Food Production***

Unlike my findings from the earlier study of rural practitioners described in Chapter 2, nineteen of twenty urban practitioners spoke more to the politics of local food—how it can improve health, reduce negative environmental impacts, and how it is tied to a movement that could revolutionize the world around us. Four of the nineteen also talked about how their practice of local food production was rooted in a religious or ethical desire to be part of what they see as their Creator's plans. These practitioners demonstrated their ethics of doing what is “right” and what “God wants one to do” by caring for those less fortunate through sharing foods, by caring for the earth in using organic methods, and by consuming food with others as fellowship. Many practitioners referred to this as a “stewardship mentality.” This is one manifestation of a “politicized-ethical impetus.” What else is representative of a “politicized impetus?” Numerous references to Wendell Berry—famed writer, farmer, and local agriculture proponent— indicated a politically-motivated participation in home food preservation.



Common references in this political theme also include terms like *revolution* (as used by Chelsea), *big ag*, and other similar sentiments indicating a desire to overhaul the system.

Wendell Berry's treatises on the plight of American farmers have made him a popular hero in the eyes of many seeking justice, healthfulness, and community in our food system. Though world famous, Wendell Berry is an icon for local food supporters in Kentucky. He is a farmer, novelist, poet, cultural critic, and environmental activist who lives in Henry County, Kentucky—roughly 70 miles northwest of Lexington. He has spoken at various community events over the years, such as the *Healthy Foods, Local Farms Conference* held annually in Louisville. He has also spoken against energy extraction practices like mountaintop removal during *I Love Mountains Day* organized by Kentuckians for the Commonwealth in Frankfort, Kentucky. For Berry, the mistreatment of land through conventional agriculture, or even mining and natural gas hydro-fracturing practices, is indicative of unsustainable living practices and exploitation of the earth. His 1977 work, *The Unsettling of America*, addressed the problems of conventional agriculture and laid out his predictions on the future of agriculture as it was apparent to him in the 1970s. It was this modern ideal of agriculture, the system, that Berry fought against as he urged a cultural awakening and revolution of agriculture practices with his twelve public remedies. He ended his treatise by saying we can overcome the system through “one great force: the power of Creation, with good care, with kindly use, to heal itself” (Berry, 1977, pp. 223).

In this passage, we can see how Berry's work is critical of the instrumentality of the conventional industrial food system,

“The people will eat what the corporations decide for them to eat. They will be detached and remote from the sources of their life, joined to them only by corporate tolerance. They will have become consumers purely—consumptive machines—which is to say, the slaves of producers...it is impossible to make machines of soil, plants, and animals without making machines also of people” (Berry, 1977, pp. 74-75).

Study participants used Berry's work to frame their resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld. They supported his critical approach to the system and promotion of local food systems. His works are typically required reading for students of sustainable agriculture. Reading Berry appears to be a taken-for-granted assumption for most urban participants, as evidenced by Belinda's statement, "You know, I like to read Wendell Berry, *of course*, I'm from Kentucky" (emphasis by author). This could explain why so many young, predominately college educated preservation practitioners cite him as a source of inspiration.

Urban food preservation practitioners are primarily motivated by political and ethical concerns. This manifests itself through resisting the system—the conventional industrial food production system which shapes our nation's diet. It is possible that the passage of time between the initial study of rural practitioners (2009) and the recent study of urban practitioners (2013) could account for some of this increased awareness of the politics of food, since local food issues seem more prevalent and research on health is ever-increasing. This finding does not mean that all urban practitioners are motivated only by politics and ethics. Some are also upholding tradition or find gardening and preservation to be enjoyable.

In contrast, three of twenty rural preservers utilized local food terminology and cited political motivations for their practice. Though local food terminology was used by a minority of rural preservers, these few did indicate they were concerned about food safety, toxic chemicals, and the overall healthfulness and taste of foods produced by the industrial agriculture system. This means that while tradition was the primary motivator for rural practitioners, it was not the only motivating factor. It also suggests that discussions of local food and food politics takes different forms in different regions, as we can see by the references to Wendell Berry's work as inspiration for the urban practitioners.

### *The Place of Food- Race, the Past, and the Future*

A common theme amongst urban food preservers was the way that home gardening and food preservation connected them to place. “Place” is important because it ties one to a particular culture and communicates many things about oneself simply by attaching oneself to a location—for better or worse (Kingsolver, 2011). Place is constructed from the interplay of beliefs and values attached to a location (Seifert and Shaw, 2013, pp. 266). For many, home gardening and home food preservation was a family skill waiting to be actualized which would bring them closer to their rural roots. For others, an urban homestead was a place full of the promise of a better life. “Thirteen of the twenty urban practitioners felt a connection to place through either an old rural home or a feeling of being connected to a family member's rural upbringing. The finding that urban practitioners tied their practices to some connection with rurality—a former home, a family member from a rural area—was similar to the rural preservation practitioners who associated gardening and canning with their childhood. Through the act of gardening and preserving, they celebrated that connection to family and place they would otherwise feel distanced from. Others created their own sense of place through an ideal of rurality, which creates spaces for freedom and self-subsistence.

The African American experience with place is complicated by slavery and institutional racism. The association of rural spaces and agriculture with forced labor has created negative connotations for gardening and food production for some African Americans. A climate of institutional racism kept many African Americans from owning land as they were denied farm loans and government subsidies by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA, *Black Farmers in America*, 2002). Additionally, local elites, the “grass tops” not the grass roots, were often given decision-making power to disseminate federal funding for crop subsidies in rural areas.

These white local elites withheld funds from black Americans and instead created white spaces for agriculture (Wood and Ragar, 2012, pp. 17). This prevented African American farmers, who aspired to live off the land from realizing their goals. Black Americans who might have preferred to stay in a rural area were instead forced to leave their farms for the promise of jobs in the industrial northern states. The rural landscape could mean many different things for black Americans—a reminder of slavery, the lived experience of being pushed off the land and unable to be self-sufficient, or an ideal to return to and reclaim through the practices of food production.

The notion of escaping the rural and what that place entails—hard labor and often poverty—was discussed by some who grew up in rural areas. This theme was similar to findings of rural practitioners who said their children and grandchildren did not practice because they desired distance from rural life in order to escape the hard manual labor, seek an education and acquire non-farm work in urban areas. Most of the urban practitioners discussed how their grandparents, parents, or they themselves moved away from the rural to the urban in order to find a non-farm career, but then ended up realizing the value of their agrarian pasts. They not only felt happy with reconnecting to the land through their urban gardening, but they connected again to their pasts. They awakened skills for growing and preserving that had been dormant. The desire to move from the rural to the urban was once an indictment on the “good work” Wendell Berry celebrates and proved his point that to many, producing food was a devalued practice. The tide seems to be turning now, however, as many highly educated urban dwellers with rural roots seek to return in some ways through the gardens and preservation practices of their youth.

Thirteen urban practitioners who had a sense of the “good life” connected that sensibility to their concerns of improving the food system and reducing environmental impact.

Through *place* some practitioners could live a life they saw as more just and less degrading to the earth. They could live “intentionally” and reduce their ecological footprints by producing as much for themselves as possible. They could let their children run free, play with chickens, and form a connection to the land with their own agrarian experiences in the city. The urban homestead seems to incorporate the best of both worlds for these practitioners—they live close to well-paying, or meaningful occupations that would be more difficult to find in rural Kentucky, but they also have the space and freedom that comes with an urban farm. They believe their homes and practices are a way to balance out other behaviors and practices that are less sustainable.

### ***Environmental Sustainability through Subsistence***

The goal of living more environmentally sustainably was a motivating factor for nineteen urban participants in this study. They discussed environmental issues along various levels of scope. Some practitioners like Erin and Hank took a macro-level view of current environmental destruction and saw their actions of self-subsistence agriculture as ways to change the systemic issues they think are causing destruction. For them, conventional agriculture and its practices were but one of plethora of issues facing the earth. Climate change, for example, was understood as being both an externality of the system's colonization of the lifeworld, and a reification of unsustainable practices. Others like Sally, Peggy, and Brittany pointed out specific meso-level issues such as the debate between organic food production versus non-organic food production. Through growing their own, they are controlling the amount of chemicals they are exposed to in order to protect their own health and that of the planet.

Sustainability was understood to include measures of self-provisioning. This self-provisioning went beyond the individual level of growing one's food, to a larger food shed, or

regional level. Being conscious of how the conventional agriculture system overburdens some ecosystems (like those in California) to supply food nationally led urban practitioners to frame sustainability in terms of what the local land can support. Supporting farmers markets and local agriculture within 100 miles of one's home was viewed as reducing demand for conventional agriculture, thus sending a message for it to transition to something more sustainable.

Compared to the rural practitioners who briefly mentioned concerns of chemicals in their food or genetically modified organisms, the urban practitioners discussed environmental impacts at length and often cited films like *Food, Inc.* (2009) or companies who are seen to be environmentally destructive like Monsanto. Twelve of twenty rural practitioners voiced concerns about chemicals and pesticides in their foods as a motivation for preserving, whereas, nineteen of twenty of the urban practitioners voiced the same concerns.

### ***Future of Home Food Preservation as a Practice***

By and large, when asked about the future of home food preservation, urban practitioners were optimistic it would continue to grow in popularity. Even Hank's self-admitted dismal outlook for the planet is contradicted by the fact he plants fruit trees around Louisville. This act is an investment in the future which he will literally not witness the fruits of for some time. Two of twenty practitioners felt that future generations would either not be interested at all in food preservation or would lose interest after practicing it as a fad. Eighteen urban practitioners were hopeful that both home food preservation and home gardening would continue. They see the proliferation of local food organizations, the increased number of books and online blogs, and a sense of longing for meaning as reasons why the future looks bright for the practice. This differs greatly from the rural practitioners in 2009-2010 who said that people might continue the practice as a means to save money but overall they felt it was a “dying art form.”

## **The Lifeworld and Taken-for-Granted Food Practices**

Despite efforts to obtain a representative sample of urban practitioners through the use of purposive sampling strategies, the urban participants were largely homogenous in race and levels of education. This poses some questions about the representativeness of the findings since the majority of the participants were somehow already associated with sustainable agriculture in some way. Thirteen of the twenty were aware of the local foods movement and its major issues due to their backgrounds in either working with farm related organizations or learning about the issues at university. These urban participants spoke at length about their motivations and had clearly thought about the issues of self-sufficiency, home gardening, and food preservation from political, environmental, and sociocultural perspectives.

Though many of the same topics (opposing the conventional agriculture system, concerns about food additives, lack of control, and environmental issues related to food production) were present in the rural participants' interviews, these ideas were seemingly more taken-for-granted among rural practitioners. This represented part of the lifeworld which is not questioned, so rural practitioners spoke less at great length by comparison. The biggest difference between the rural and urban practitioners is that the urban discuss their resistance to the system's colonization of the lifeworld in more overt and academized ways than the rural. It makes sense that rural practitioners would act without discussing it, since the tradition is like a second nature and has been a large part of their lifeworld for several decades. The urban practitioners, having to actively seek out the practices and often learn them from the start (or get advice from family) were prepared to discuss their motivations because they had some awareness they were changing their lifeworlds to include self-provisioning and to exclude conventional industrial food production.

Phenomenologically, then, the way participants formulate significance in their practices of home food preservation and home gardening varies by the lifeworlds they occupy. Participants whose lifeworlds consist of actively seeking to change the food system will speak about these acts in more political terms. Those who have grown up practicing home food preservation as a tradition have done so for so many years that the motivations behind their actions are an unquestioned reality. For those in rural Eastern Kentucky, industrial agriculture did not penetrate into the area historically due to the lack of transportation facilities and markets (Billings and Blee, 2000, pp. 165), though subsistence agriculture in a patriarchal moral economy did exist as a survival strategy during the capitalist-industrial transformation (Billings and Blee, 2000, pp. 207). This patriarchal moral economy is defined as “the social practices and relations that form the intersection of family and economy” (Billings and Blee, 2000, pp. 165). This means the division of authority rested within the male head of household despite the fact women produced most of the goods for the home in addition to helping produce food. It also means that the unpaid labor of women and children was taken-for-granted. Land was subdivided between the numerous children of rural family farms, which over the years, lead to smaller and smaller land holdings. This subsistence economy was a key historic feature of Appalachian rural counties, like Wolfe and Lawrence. In this way, Eastern Kentucky held onto its subsistence practices longer than other areas of the United States but ultimately this reduction in land access led to the failure of the subsistence economy's ability to provide for its growing populations. Many moved from rural communities to urban, industrial cities to become a wage laborer. Those who did not move away from Eastern Kentucky for employment in urban areas, did not have to “take back” gardening in the ways that non-rural residents have.

The rural practitioners speak about home gardening and home food preservation in more traditional, organic ways. These taken-for-granted assumptions about the future of home food



preservation could also explain why the rural practitioners who see gardening and food preservation as just “something they've always done” would think that its less of a novelty. They also expect young people who move away from their rural homes to discontinue the practice. This follows the logic that if one is no longer tied to a physical space in Appalachia, the traditional practice will not continue. For some, this also represents a slight cultural divorce because those who move from the rural to the urban are understood to be actively changing their lifeworlds and leaving part of their rural lives behind.

On the other hand, the urban practitioners who are conducting home gardening or food preservation are excited to practice these seemingly new, rediscovered activities; they think everyone should be as interested in the practices as they are. The urban practitioners experience a lifeworld where political actions to improve the environment and the food system create a space for these practices to grow and be shared among their friends and social networks. They have attended university programs which analyze trends in industrialized agriculture; they have researched food localization efforts, and were expected to read Wendell Berry's works. Thirteen of twenty practitioners have a history of subsistence agriculture in their family. Despite this connection to subsistence agriculture, a transformative event was found to motivate urban participants to produce their own food. For Meredith, her involvement in the local food organization in West Louisville invigorated her gardening and preserving and added a social justice perspective to her lifeworld. For others like Belinda, it was the reading of Wendell Berry in a college classroom that changed her lifeworld. For Stan, it was moving away from home and longing for a connection to his roots while also encouraging urban youths to get involved in home food production.

Thus, through this comparison, we see that through actions—deliberate or not—the lifeworlds of people are transformed and their understanding of the system can change. The

ways in which we communicate our ideas and values reveal the taken-for-granted lifeworlds we occupy. This is important to understand in all research.

### **Conclusion: Sharing Common Ground**

Urban home food preservation practitioners in Kentucky were vocal about their political/ethical motivations, their connections to a sense of place, and concerns for environmental sustainability linked through their practices. Utilization of a local food discourse and an ease in discussing the issues of conventional agriculture versus local food economies separates the urban from the rural, but perhaps only due to the lifeworlds each group occupies. The lifeworlds of the practitioners shape their understanding of their own motivations. Those who are religious and carry a stewardship interpretation of the Bible see their support of local agriculture and self-sufficiency as upholding a moral standing. Those who have studied food issues from an academic or career perspective see their self-sufficiency much like Wendell Berry's notion of “good work”—an approach to life he discusses through numerous essays that include sustainable, local agriculture among other things such as local economics, healthy rural communities, activism, and work that has a more existential purpose (Berry, 1981).

Still, the urban study participants share many commonalities with rural Kentucky practitioners. All urban practitioners, like their rural counterparts, discussed the community-building aspect of growing, sharing, and preserving food together. In this, they have hope for a better future as they work toward making a local food revolution happen. All practitioners agreed that home gardening and home food preservation were enjoyable and said they gained pride in sharing their home produced foods with friends and family. Like the rural practitioners, several urban practitioners said they would like to see a program developed which matches experienced preservers and gardeners with those new to the practice. This could be particularly helpful in the African American community where institutional racism has negatively impacted

America's black farming traditions. In addition to building a greater sense of inter-generational community, the practitioners would enjoy learning the tips from those who have produced foods through all types of conditions and challenges.

Programs or efforts that address the role racism plays in food deserts and that assist in creating community gardens are changing the story of black Americans and farming. Creating spaces like church gardens where young African Americans can form a different relationship with food production ensures a new generation can have a positive relationship with the land and open discussions about institutionalized racism in the past and present. Land-sharing programs for African American and low-income farmers could help young people get into local food production. Increased institutional support for programs training minorities in agriculture could be as supportive of organic and small-scale food production as it is for large scale, conventional agriculture. Four urban practitioners thought home food preservation could easily be part of economic development initiatives through value-added products, or items like jams and salsas, which have value added to them through the processing of raw produce into a commodity item. Many of them purchase items like these at their local farmers markets now but think farmers within the region could expand this market. Creating a program that would connect new preservation practitioners with experienced ones and supporting policies that make it easy to produce local, value-added products are indeed areas that would likely have great support in Kentucky. Undertaking such acts could resist the conventional industrial food system's colonization of the lifeworld while enabling participants to engage in the “good work” they long to do.

## Chapter 3

### The Hope in Home Gardening

“They really had no idea where food comes from. They really thought green beans just appear, and I'm not kidding, they just appear in Kroger...I knew that a lot of people didn't know that a red bell pepper is just a green one, but I kind of thought everyone knew that red tomatoes started out as green. I don't know why but I just figured that. We planted tomatoes and peppers with these kids. The green tomatoes appeared and they were so excited they wanted to pick some so they could have fried green tomatoes. They picked all of them and then they asked, where are the red ones?”-Eloise, a local food activist in Louisville discussing her work with neighborhood children

Eloise's comments highlight a growing trend in our society—our disconnection from the natural systems on this planet which provide for our well-being. The final article in this dissertation examines E.O. Wilson's concept of biophilia amongst home gardeners. Biophilia literally translates to *love of life, or love of living systems*. Wilson famously used the term to describe the “urge to affiliate with other forms of life” (Wilson, 1984, pp. 85). A biologist, he based his understanding on the belief humans have a biological predisposition to feel close to the natural world as a means for the survival of our species. In the next article, I will provide further details about what exactly biophilia is, how a connection with the natural world is necessary today, and how our behaviors toward environmentally sustainable practices might derive from these attitudes of biophilia.

In my second article, I found that desire for environmental sustainability was a motivating factor for the practice of home gardening and home food preservation in urban Kentucky. With the environmental challenges facing our society, it is important that we look to improve the relationships between people and our natural environment. As a follow-up to the second article I ask, how are home gardeners seeking to protect the natural world through reconnecting to it?

This is a question that has been bothering me a lot lately. I, like everyone I know, am increasingly more connected to my laptop, smartphone, and other gadgets—often to the exclusion of people and interaction with the natural world. I actively try to not be so dependent upon them, and I am not the only one as I hear friends setting “no gadgets past 6 pm” rules in their homes. The youngest people in our society are being introduced to technology at a much earlier age than my generation. A child during the 1980s and 1990s, I grew up in a world without the Internet and I played outside a lot more because of that, in spite of Nintendo and other gaming systems. What will the relationship to the natural world be like for children of the present and the future? Having an abstract understanding of environmental issues is important, but what use is it if those charged with deciding our future policies have little real experience with our earth's natural systems? How can they protect the natural world from our destructive human tendencies if they do not love it and know it?

In the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters, I had the opportunity to teach the course Sociology and the Family. One of the books I selected was Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* (2008). This book explained everything I was seeing daily, or rather not seeing. Besides catching the occasional school out for recess break, I rarely see children playing outside anymore. Very few kids on bikes, on sidewalks, or simply sitting on their porches. Living in Lexington, part of this can be explained by the fact that children in some neighborhoods like mine, are possibly not allowed outside without adult supervision. Fears of abductions or injury surely keep many parents from allowing their children the freedom to play outdoors in an urban area. So what of the children in my rural hometown? They too were shockingly absent from the outside world. Meanwhile, on campus, I have watched over the years as students who used to gather in the halls before class have stopped talking to one another. Instead, nearly every single student now stands, head bent, staring at their smartphones or tablets. I observed students leave

the classroom, pull out their phones and walk across campus—only looking up long enough to not run into others. Some even have near-misses with cars as they cross the street, so wrapped up in their gadgets. Have younger generations always been like this, I wondered? We, after all, did have Walkmans and then iPods before the smartphone revolution. Had they had a similar childhood immersed in a rural space to counterbalance their adulthood techno-immersion like I had? Were things just changing faster than I was ready for? Had I, over the course of this doctoral dissertation, simply grown older and more judgmental toward younger generations as the cliché goes?

Curious to see how technology might be impacting their relationship with the natural world, I devised a project for my students. I called it The Nature Experiment. The project consisted of four sections, each addressing a different aspect mentioned in *Last Child in the Woods*. Students were to reflect on a journal-type prompt and include an artistic component like a photo, a poem, or a short story. One student, rising above and beyond, composed a song for the assignment. Students would then compile their reflections into a digital booklet or a real, hand-bound booklet. All would be shared, with their permission, on a website (working with the UK College of Arts and Sciences) I made for our class so they could blend both nature and technology.

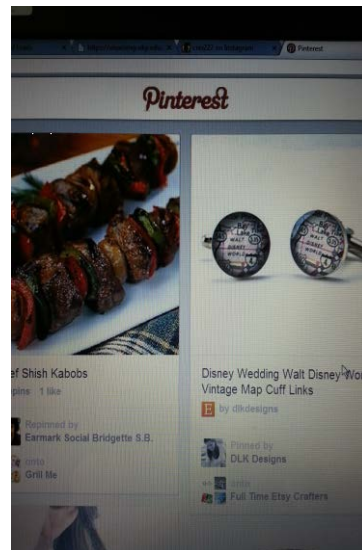
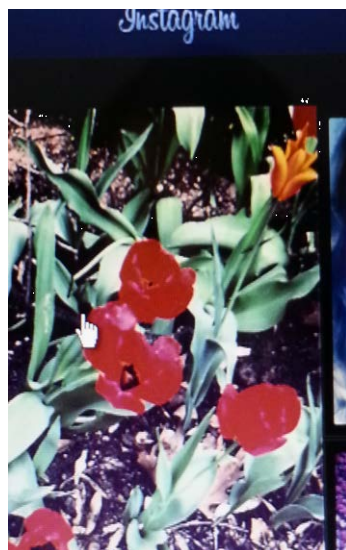
What I found out through The Nature Experiment is that every student, even those whose past experience of the natural world entailed only sporadic walks in a city park, wanted to have a closer relationship with nature. They were all appalled at how much time they spend online and staring at a screen of some sort. Some of them blamed our class assignments for making them rely upon computers and the Internet, and rightfully so. Many of them included a screen shot of their typical work set up while writing a paper. At the top of their screens, multiple windows were opened and calling to them from sites like Facebook, Twitter, ESPN,

and Instagram. The following photos and quotes reflect some of the students' concerns of over-relying on technology and lacking a true connection to the natural world.



(Photo by Jonathan K., 2013)

“I was sad to find out that I sent over 68 text messages and received around 73. I search Pinterest for a solid two hours finding ideas for a new haircut and checked my Instagram 22 times! Sadly, I was able to see that my phone is pretty much glued to my hand during the day.”  
- Student reflection by Georgia S.



(Photos by Catherine E., 2013)

Another student, Catherine E., included these photos of the websites she visits most often. These, she admitted, distract her from doing her homework and going outdoors more. She stated her position on the importance of children being connected to the natural world and not relying solely on the unreality of online experiences, “Out in nature there are no rules but freedom to try and either succeed or fail. The outdoors allows children to develop a sense of self and their surroundings in reality rather than fantasy.”

Despite readily admitting their own disconnection from the natural world, students participating in The Nature Experiment all agreed that increasing future generations interactions and appreciation for the natural world would be a positive thing. Every single student said that being disconnected from nature was a bad thing; no one thought it was a non-issue. Many of the students said The Nature Experiment changed the ways they view the world and their roles in it. Several committed to making more time for hiking, camping, or just relaxing outdoors. They promised to ingrain a love of nature into their future children and discussed how they would do so with games, activities, and books.

Like Eloise who was surprised to find that children in her neighborhood were so disconnected from the natural world that they did not realize tomatoes turn from green to red, or yellow, or orange, I was similarly shocked to find students who admitted they used their phones to avoid interacting with others before class, like in the previous photo. In addition to being disconnected from the natural world, it seems we are increasingly becoming disconnected from others in very visceral ways. The following final article explores how biophilia can be used to explain our relationships with the natural world. It explores the hope that exists for our reconnection with the natural world through acts like home gardening and discusses what this



might mean for behaving more sustainability. It asks, “Can home gardening be an indicator of attitudes of biophilia? If so, do these attitudes translate into environmentally sustainable behaviors? Do they reduce our alienation from the natural world?”

### Article 3

#### **“We can create lots and lots of chaos or we can create good things”: Home gardening, biophilia, and links to environmental sustainability**

##### **Abstract**

This article examines qualitative interviews of 40 rural and urban home-gardeners in urban and rural Kentucky and discusses how attitudes of biophilia and environmentally sustainable behaviors are connected. A sense of biophilia was found to be part of every home gardener's sentiments when interviewed. I examined each interview to see if attitudes of biophilia are related to motivations to behave in more environmentally sustainable ways and measured this environmental sustainability through the use or avoidance of chemical pesticides/herbicides. Though every single home-gardener in the study exhibited attitudes of biophilia, those in rural Kentucky had a more flexible understanding of environmentally sustainable behaviors specifically regarding the use of pesticides or herbicides. Urban Kentucky home-gardeners were explicit in their refusal to use pesticides or herbicides as a sustainable practice and framed their practice as one way to reduce their negative impacts on the natural world. Future research is recommended to better examine the linkages between biophilia and environmentally sustainable behaviors like organic gardening.

##### **Introduction**

The average North American has lost touch with the natural world. We spend at least 90 percent of our modern lives indoors (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2008, pp. 2-73), rely more and more upon our devices for communication while still feeling alienated (Turkle, 2012), and have lost the ability to be self-sufficient in food production as agriculture has become more industrial and global (Lyson and Guptill, 2004, pp. 371). Despite this, interest in home gardening is on the rise and explored as part of the “civic agriculture” conversation Lyson and Guptill brought to the forefront (Conley, 2012; Black, 2010; Campbell, 2010; Click and Ridberg, 2010; and McEntee, 2010.) In this research, I explore how outdoor home gardens and the practices of home food preservation are connected to environmental sustainability. The do-it-yourself practice of home gardening shares similar concerns with environmental

sustainability movements. Considerations for the health impacts of pesticides and herbicides, the fossil fuels used to produce and transport conventional agriculture products, and the overuse of water in drought-prone food producing areas like the North American West motivate some people to grow food for themselves. This article examines whether or not home gardening has the potential to reconnect North Americans by examining how rural and urban Kentucky home-gardeners feel toward the natural world.

In my previous research, I compared urban and rural Kentucky home gardeners and home food preservation practitioners who reported that their self-provisioning was one facet of their quest to be environmentally sustainable (Conley, 2014, pp. 27). I found this fact was more directly stated by urban Kentucky gardeners than for those in rural Kentucky. Of twenty urban practitioners, thirteen were motivated by a sense of environmental sustainability while only three of twenty rural Kentucky practitioners could be classified as sharing the same motivation (Conley, 2014, pp. 27-28). I then discussed how the taken-for-granted lifeworlds of rural practitioners could account for the lack of terminology and buzzwords that denote politicized concerns for environmental sustainability. In this research, I will examine how attitudes toward nature are linked to home gardening and environmentally sustainable behaviors. I explore whether rural and urban Kentucky home-gardeners exhibit a sense of biophilia, or a love for feeling of connection to the natural world. I then discuss if these participants exhibited behaviors that are considered environmentally sustainable, measured here by the use or avoidance of chemical pesticides/herbicides. It is my goal to explore how everyday practices like home-gardening might raise awareness of environmental sustainability through bringing one closer to nature. In addition to learning more about the sustainability practices of small, subsistence based gardeners, this research could also shed light on approaches needed to face our planet's environmental crises.

## **Exploring Biophilia's Links to Environmental Sustainability**

In this research, I use the phrase “the natural world” to represent the living environment we humans share with other animals and forms of life. The natural world encompasses the flora and fauna that is not created by humans using advanced technologies. It is a system where no waste occurs because in nature “all that is sloughed off in the living arc of a natural cycle remains within the cycle; it becomes fertility, the power of life to continue” (Berry, 1981, pp. 117.) The natural world exists in both rural and urban spaces, yet is less associated with the urban spaces due to the prevalence of human constructions and paved surfaces. To set a more abstract parameter, humans are dependent upon the natural world as much as other animals, yet often experience a disconnection from nature that has increased correspondingly with industrialization. To be a modern human being is to be less connected to the natural world in our day-to-day lives, yet very dependent on the “natural resources” our world possesses. Thus, this independence from the natural world is a mirage— one thinly upheld by our economic system and a society, which enables us to be wholly dependent on something we never need to see, appreciate, or experience firsthand. We drink water from our municipal sources without understanding where it comes from and we dispose of garbage assuming it will simply disappear. We are disconnected from where our food comes from and where our wastes go. In this process we lose sight of our impacts upon the living systems of the planet. The natural world and our relationship to it is examined here in the concepts of biophilia and biophobia. Both of these concepts help us understand how people relate to the natural world and provide the foundation for the following discussion of home gardeners, their connection to the environment, and concerns for sustainability.

Author Richard Louv discusses biophilia as the “life enhancing sense of rootedness in nature” that should be fostered in children today who are suffering from an affliction he terms nature deficit disorder, a decidedly modern ailment (Louv, 2008, pp. 246). Louv was drawing on the work of biologist, E.O. Wilson who described biophilia as “urge to affiliate with other forms of life” for the survival of our species (Wilson, 1984, pp. 85). Humans can experience biophilia in ways that awaken a primal curiosity,

“I offer this as a formula of re-enchantment to invigorate poetry and myth: mysterious and little known organisms live within walking distance of where you sit. Splendor awaits in minute proportions.” (Wilson, 1984, pp. 139).

His theory is based on the fact pre-industrial humans lived much more closely to the natural world and depended upon it directly for survival. Over the years, we have become more distanced and lost our affinity for other forms of life. This love of other living systems, say Wilson and Louv, is present in us despite our disconnection from nature. This means that even those who are extremely detached from the natural world could experience a spark of reconnection if the proper activating experience is had. This lead me to consider, could home gardening act as a catalyst for biophilia? If so, could this biophilia lead to environmentally sustainable behaviors?

Relating to the natural world impacts our sense of well-being and our concern for the natural environment. Research into the subjective measure of *nature connectedness* revealed a predictive quality regarding being environmentally sustainable— “people who feel connected to nature want to protect it” (Zelenski and Nisbet, 2014, pp. 4). Nature also has restorative effects as it allows us to reduce our *directed attention*—a product of modern living—which often drains us mentally and leaves us stressed (Kaplan, 1995, pp. 172). As the stakes grow higher, humans and their relationship to the natural world appear linked on deep psychological levels.

Aboriginal Australians facing severe drought and elevated rates of suicide and depression were improved with projects that support *country*, their multi-dimensional, holistic understanding of both natural environment and customs (Berry, et al. 2010, pp. 142). Conversely, it follows that disturbing news about the state of our natural world can lead to unhappiness and depression. The American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica's 2014 joint report on mental health impacts and climate change reveal a complex relationship. Both extreme, sudden weather events triggered by climate change and the gradual changes to our climate were found to lead to depression, PTSD, a sense of loss, and fatalism (Clayton, et al, 2014, pp. 18-25). Similarly other research indicates that people who feel unable to make positive impacts regarding climate change and perceived degradation to the environment feel helpless and lost (Moser, 2013, pp. 298, Zelenski and Nisbet, 2014, pp. 18).

If biophilia is the affinity one feels for the natural world, then it is important to discuss how *biophobia* could also impact environmental sustainability. Biophobia, according to David Orr, is a socially learned detachment from the natural world that is undergirded by modernization in industrial societies. It is a preference for the human-devised world of inventions and conditioned spaces. Though the concept carries a strong negative connotation due to its suffix- *phobia*, I want to clarify that in this research, biophobia is used to represent the detachment from the natural world and an overall faith in modern man's ability to control its environment. To classify someone or some act as biophobic is to say they place human interests above all those of the rest of the natural world—an act that is currently the status-quo in our society. This detachment from nature and resentment toward it, this biophobia, is detrimental to our survival as a species because it asserts that humans can be disconnected from the natural world without negative consequences. This disconnection is something we moderns, with our ability to “control” our environments, have experienced through the culminating practices of

modernization. In industrialized countries, we control the climates in our homes and vehicles so we do not have to fully experience the weather as it occurs. We can continue to consume, then waste, vast amounts of resources like oil, timber, food, and water yet still continue with our lives because the impacts of oil drilling/refining, deforestation, hunger, and drought are largely hidden from daily view, often taking place in the “developing” world. Humans maintain this disconnection from nature only as long as we have the ample natural resources and fossil fuels to prop up the current standards of living. Unless a series of crises impact multiple facets of life for a majority of people in industrialized countries, changes to the status quo are rare.

Anthropogenic climate change, threats from diseases like Ebola and Malaria and flu, impacts from our natural resource extraction, food crises from droughts, outdated civil infrastructure, persistent poverty, and political instability from prolonged war are just a few of the major issues facing our society today. Perhaps these might be enough crises to shake up the status-quo and urge industrialized nations to question our alienation from nature.

Today's biophobia, according to Orr (1993), is the result of a series of revolutions in thinking that gave birth to modernization and industrial societies in six major paradigm shifts:

- 1) We stopped seeing the earth as alive and worthy of our fear and respect,
- 2) Through Cartesian thought we started seeing animals as machines, devoid of their own worth, but serving utilitarian purposes for humans,
- 3) We started favoring “hard data” over sympathy for nature because it can easily be counted and translated into money,
- 4) We transformed our world into material resources using Francis Bacon's theories to provide a “logic” for the combining of power, money, and knowledge,
- 5) We created a philosophy of improvement that centered on growing economies and named it progress, and
- 6) We strategically created mass consumerism by inducing human dissatisfaction via advertising industries propelled by ever changing trends

(Orr, 1993, pp. 189). Modernization then, has “represented dramatic changes in how we regard

the natural world and our role in it. These changes are now so thoroughly ingrained in us that we can scarcely conceive of any other manner of thinking (Orr, 1993, pp. 189).”

The air we breathe, the water we drink, and the environments where we live are as vital to our existence as they are impacted by our actions. Some may ask, what's wrong with setting ourselves apart from nature and recognizing our superiority? As Orr argues, “Biophobia is not OK because it is the foundation for a politics of domination and exploitation” (Orr, 1993, pp. 421). If we have no connection to the natural world, if we can create for ourselves spaces where humans control our surroundings in as many ways as possible, then we forget the complexities of the natural world. When we forget the natural world, we can more easily objectify it and monetize it, because we see it as the “other” and less as a part of ourselves. We lose that *urge to affiliate with other forms of life* and we will find ourselves unprepared for the challenges we face concerning environmental sustainability. After all, if we are detached from the natural world, how can we ever know it and love it enough to protect it from our actions?

### **Environmental Sustainability and Home Gardening**

Though there are many definitions of sustainability, including David Orr's simple “the arts of longevity” (Orr, 2002, pp. 11), all definitions come down to an understanding of materialism. Understandings of environmental sustainability have evolved from anthropocentric views that we should protect the “raw materials” required for human needs and balance them against the “sinks” for the wastes produced (Goodland, 1995, pp. 3) to more nuanced understandings of sustainability that build upon the instrumentalist approaches. Bell and Morse discuss two types of sustainability. “Strong sustainability” is the understanding the environment is crucial for our survival as a species and no economic trade-off is seen as worthy of degrading the environment. On the contrary, “weak sustainability” represents an approach where the environment has a monetary value placed upon it. Policies like cap and trade would fall into this



latter model as it is concerned primarily with maintaining a level of economic benefits and considers the environmental impacts in a secondary cost-benefit approach. “Of these two the weak sustainability form is the one that currently dominates in the global economy” (Bell and Morse, 2008, pp. 14.) Both the strong and weak sustainability definitions have embedded within them an understanding that measuring the material world can give us information about the state of the environment and its ultimate sustainability.

Since everyone on this planet must eat, part of a complex understanding of sustainability includes discussions of sustainable agriculture. The interplay of limits to pollution, water usage, and the natural resource extraction used to fuel the current system of agriculture is addressed in the literature of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture in this research is defined as a system of food production, which “balances concerns of environmental soundness, economic viability, and social justice among all sectors of society” (Allen, et al, 1991). Food production and environmental sustainability are deeply entwined (Bell and Morse, 2008, pp. 8). Since one-fifth of land in the United States is utilized for crop production (Nickerson, et al, 2011, pp. 15), the practices that impact that land are of consequence to us all. The inputs to the soil and water used for industrial agriculture have become increasingly important issues as more people grow concerned with pesticides, herbicides, drought, and water contamination from farming. The method of home-gardening, however, allows one the power to control or completely avoid the use of pesticides and herbicides from their food production. Likewise, water concerns can be alleviated by the small-scale nature of home gardening and acts of water stewardship like collecting rain water for use in the garden. The use of fossil fuels for large scale farm inputs is reduced for the home garden, again due to the scale of production. In essence, home-gardening can function in ways that are more sustainable, unlike conventional industrial agriculture, which

relies on chemical and mechanical inputs, intensive irrigation techniques, and fossil fuels for the transportation of foodstuffs and materials.

### **Critically analyzing Conversations for Indications of Biophilia: The Role of Bricolage**

The word *critical* is often used in discussing a theoretical standpoint. Critical sociologists, anthropologists, or criminologists abound; but what does being a critical researcher actually mean? The criticalist schools of thought and the importance of bricolage in blurring disciplinary boundaries are utilized in this research but require clarification. Bricolage, in its sociological applications, is the piecing together of social phenomena to paint a whole picture with the understanding that objective reality can only be known through its representations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pp. 5). It “exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world and the complications of power” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, pp. 317). Appropos of my Appalachian roots and interest in documentary film, Denzin and Lincoln's likening of bricolage to quilt-making and filmmaking resonate with me. To barely scratch the surface of explanation, critical research is understanding “how all thought and actions are mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, pp. 304), which is to say one understands the multi-faceted complexities that determine their worlds. The varied intersections of race, class, gender, age, and ethnicity mean there is no one way to interpret the social world. Critical theorists recognize the inherently political nature of their work and advocate for social change based on deep understandings of their empirical evidence.

“Whereas traditional researchers see their task as the description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself.” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, pp. 305).

I approach this article from this critical researcher perspective, illustrating the empirical evidence of our disconnection from nature while advocating for people to maintain a sense of biophilia. I rely on an “interpretative and political bricolage” approach, which understands that research is an interactive process shaped, in part, by my own lifeworld. I am seeking a civic social science based on “a politics of hope” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pp.6). What does this mean for this research? It means that multi-method approaches are used in the analysis of interview “texts.” For example, I could analyze the texts, or quotes from interviews, as they are, or I could expand the analysis of these texts by reading them from a feminist or Marxist perspective, which examines the intersections of gender or class on the texts. I also acknowledge my own lived experience in shaping what I know about the people and the Kentucky counties I have studied. In this way, I use bricolage to “highlight the relationship between a researcher's way of seeing and the social location of my own personal history” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, pp. 316). Since this article takes a stance on the importance of reconnecting with nature, the methodology of bricolage through a critical lens is a good fit.

### ***Measuring “Environmental Sustainability” by Use of Pesticides/Herbicides***

Interviews from forty in-depth, qualitative interviews conducted between 2009-2013 were transcribed for this study. I compiled a list of sentiments that indicate a sense of biophilia and then compared these sentiments with statements indicating material concerns involving environmental sustainability in any way. (See tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.) Field notes were examined and coded for sections where participants related gardening and preserving to their personal connection to the natural world (biophilia) and for statements that supported environmental sustainability (use of pesticides/herbicides). Audio files of the interviews were transcribed and coded with these indicators and then interview excerpts were grouped by theme. I am using the degree to which the home gardener uses pesticides, herbicides, or any other non-

organic garden chemical, as the primary indicator of whether one is behaving in an environmentally sustainable way. This practice was selected because of it is seemingly straightforward—either one uses chemicals on their garden or they do not. While other concerns are included as part of an environmentally sustainable framework, like avoiding GMOs and critiquing industrial agriculture's impacts on soil, they were seen as general expressions of sustainability concerns or attitudes—not as practices. Indicating a concern for the environment (e.g. criticisms of industrial agricultural practices and GMOs) and acting on these concerns (avoiding the use of pesticides) are two different things. Therefore, tables 3.3 and 3.4 in the findings section, include the indicators of biophilia and environmental sustainability while illustrating the difference between stated concerns and actual behaviors involving the use of pesticides/herbicide

**Table 3.1, Indicators of Biophilia**

<b>Participants indicated a...</b>
relationship and/or fondness with the natural world and other life forms.
respect, a feeling of awe, or desire to enjoy the natural world in past, present, or future.
belief that enjoying the natural world is important.
belief that one's children should enjoy the natural world.
desire to preserve or protect the natural world for future generations.
past or present recognition of reciprocity with the natural world.

**Table 3.2, Indicators of Participants' Concerns of Environmental Sustainability**

<b>Participants voiced concerns about...</b>
environmental impacts of herbicides and pesticides used to produce food.
the impacts of industrial agriculture on biodiversity (monocultures, GMOs).
the irreparable current state of the environment and/or state of other life forms.
industrial agriculture and soil quality/soil loss.
peak oil or concerns of “food miles” and reliance upon petroleum.
industrial agriculture's impacts on water and links to droughts.

## **Findings: Experiencing Nature Through Biophilia in Rural and Urban Kentucky**

E.O. Wilson credits his childhood in the Florida panhandle with his early awareness of the natural world. His many adventures included playing in the cabbage palmettos, watching ivory-billed woodpeckers, and searching for snakes (Wilson, 1984, pp. 87-92.) Similarly, the physical surroundings of participants in this study shaped their childhood and attitudes toward the natural world. Not surprisingly, those home gardeners who live in rural Kentucky have many experiences of the natural world that are connected with food production. Daisy in Lawrence County recalled her childhood with joy, “I grew up riding horses, milking cows... I did everything! Slopping the hogs as they used to call it. I did everything my mom and dad said to do.” Bridgette in Lawrence County began growing grapes through Kentucky's tobacco settlement program, which encouraged tobacco farmers to shift production into non-tobacco crops. She spoke lovingly about her vineyards, even anthropomorphizing her grapes,

“I love to work in the grapes. When I planted them, they were like my little babies— watching them grow. I like the quiet and peacefulness of working in the vineyards. I like to, in the spring, when you do the dormant pruning in March and April, you watch them start to grow...I normally love it.”

Nancy, in Lawrence County, grew up on a subsistence farm and later grew a large garden to feed her own children. She said she always canned and froze enough food to get them through the winter. She feels a strong sense of pride in living in a rural place and being able to live off the land and she later told me how much she missed her old home and feeling connected to that land,

“Down through the years, doing the gardening, even as a young girl to the times when my girls were young, that is all a part of my life that I'm very proud of. I'm proud to have lived in the country. I'm proud to have had the opportunity to garden if I wanted to or if I needed to.”

Beth, also from Lawrence County, recalled the difficulties in growing so close to the farm animals her family relied on for food while she was a child,

“Maybe some people remember, like I do, a garden, was food for the winter. Everybody had a garden. And chickens and one cow for the milk. We made butter and buttermilk. We always raised a hog that got—you know, we butchered it. We got our little pig, grew him up and slaughtered him. (Laughs) That [getting attached to the animals] is the worst thing to do. Get attached to the little chickens, then they grow up and are fried chicken on Sunday. (Laughs) Take it from me my mother never let anything go to waste.”

Beth further discussed how economic necessity required her mother and family to learn about wild foraging and to rely on hunting,

“One thing mother taught me was how to go out here and pick all these wild greens that you eat. Who knows, one of these days we may depend on what we grow and what we know to eat. My best friend, she used to say, if anything happened she was moving in with me because I could kill the animals and I could pick the weeds she could eat. (Laughs.) Mom's mom, had a big family. There was 10 of them and they went through the Depression, so they knew what you could eat. They grew their own [food] and they had boys that hunted. There used to be a lot of grouse, pheasant, squirrels, and rabbits and mud turtles. There was a lot of foods that we learned to eat simply because of our grandparents, that's what they taught mom to eat.”

Beatrice, grew up in Wolfe County and like Beth, spoke reluctantly about the role of death in the process of growing foods. She even extends that discomfort to her flowers.

“Even when I kill a stinging worm, I think about 'thou shalt not kill' but I still kill them. (Laughs). I don't like to cut a tree, or pick a wildflower. I don't like to pick my own flowers in the yard. I won't even pick my gladiolus until they fall over—then I get them. But I don't go too far. I save what I can.”

In these previous statements, we can see that Beth and Beatrice are acting in ways that express biophilia, that appreciation of and connection with the natural world, but they do not romanticize self-provisioning food production. The inevitability of death is hinted at when Beatrice says she does not “go too far,” meaning, she does not let her respect for the insect or plant's life stop her from doing what she feels is necessary to producing her food.

Those in urban Kentucky, like Stan in Louisville, have memories of family who were reliant upon the land and who shared their gardening knowledge with him. He credits this upbringing with bringing his parents back to nature later in life and as motivating his desire to live off the land as much as possible.

“My grandfather remembers the smell of sauerkraut being fermented, he remembers them making wine and grinding sausage, but he never learned... Now that they're retired my parents are homesteading themselves. They have goats and chickens and an amazing garden. They're kind of making their own little hideaway back in the woods. It's just absolutely amazing.”

Prudence, like Stan, lives in Louisville now in her late 20's but actually grew up in a rural area. Here, she discusses how her family's reliance upon the land filtered into her gift giving practices. During her youth, that affiliation with self-provisioning food production was embarrassing, but she has come to appreciate it as an adult.

“Growing up, every time I would give a teacher a gift, my parents would send me with popcorn from the farm or homemade jam. I was always so embarrassed I wasn't giving a gift all the other kids were giving. Now, it's one of my favorite things to give as a gift. Something that you've labored over and you've spent time on.”

Born and raised in Louisville, Meredith discussed how despite their urban location, her parents, who were raised in the rural small town of Springfield, ended up growing food in the middle of Louisville's urban West End.

“They taught myself and my other five sibling how to grow food, but I was the one who took the most interest. We grew tomatoes, green beans, okra, radishes, squash, strawberries, potatoes. Half of our yard was a garden. Dad asked our neighbor if we could extend our yard, and they allowed us to plant food in theirs. A couple of our neighbors grew food but they could never understand how dad's grew so fast and so pretty. He worked late, in the evening hours in the garden. He didn't use no pesticides or nothing. Their parents had grown their own food in Springfield, KY and cured their own meat and killed a cow for their own hamburgers and stuff like that.”

Of the forty home gardener/home food preservation practitioners, every one expressed some positive associations with the natural world. Whether it was fond memories of helping their families on the farm, finding joy and stress relief in working the land, or stating overt

concerns for the environment, all the study participants expressed some sentiment that could be classified as an attitude of biophilia. None of the interviewees expressed a strictly utilitarian relationship with the land or natural environment. Do these attitudes translate into actual practices of environmental sustainability, however?

### **Discussing Links between Experiencing Biophilia and Environmental Sustainability**

Two major findings related to environmentally sustainable practices arose from discussions with home gardeners. First, twelve of the rural gardeners and home food preservation practitioners stated synthetic chemicals like herbicides and pesticides are potentially dangerous to humans and our environment. Despite being concerned with the use of chemicals by industrial agriculture, however, six of these twelve stated they judiciously use them when “needed.” By comparison, only two of twenty urban practitioners either used chemical inputs or discussed the need to use them. Secondly, in total, more urban home gardeners than rural (19 urban to 12 rural) were concerned about broader issues of environmental sustainability in addition to avoiding pesticides/herbicides like reducing their reliance upon petroleum, avoiding GMO's, or being concerned about conventional agriculture's impact on climate. They demonstrated this by discussing larger, systemic issues that they intricately connected to their practices of self-provisioning. These larger issues entail attempts to cancel out perceived harms from daily living and concerns of global warming. Overall, it proved difficult to assert that biophilia can directly lead to environmentally sustainable behaviors.



**Table 3.3, Rural Gardeners indicating Biophilia, Concern, and Usage of Pesticides/Herbicides by Age**

<b>Rural Gardeners Indicating Biophilia (n= 20)</b>	<b>Rural Gardeners Indicating Concern with using Pesticides/Herbicides (n=12)</b>	<b>Uses Pesticides/Herbicides Judiciously Despite Concerns (n= 6)</b>	<b>Age of Gardener (at Time of Interview)</b>
<b>Beatrice</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Frank</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>62</b>
Wanda	-	-	77
<b>Polly</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>66</b>
Phoebe	-	-	72
David	-	-	63
Pauline	-	-	60
Kacy	x	-	34
Edith	x	-	63
Bruce	x	-	64
<b>Shelby</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>48</b>
Dean	-	-	51
Hanna	x	-	51
Blanche	-	-	-
Alma	-	-	-
Rose	x	-	42
<b>Bridgette</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>76</b>
Daisy	-	-	62
Beth	x	-	61
<b>Nancy</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>56</b>

**Table 3.4, Urban Gardeners indicating Biophilia, Concern, and Usage of Pesticides/Herbicides by Age**

<b>Urban Gardeners Indicating Biophilia (n= 20)</b>	<b>Urban Gardeners Indicating Concern with using Pesticides/Herbicides (n= 19)</b>	<b>Uses Pesticides/Herbicides Judiciously Despite Concerns (n= 2)</b>	<b>Age of Gardener (at Time of Interview)</b>
<b>Alice</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>26</b>
Erin	x	-	29
Jacob	x	-	34
Kim	x	-	35
Sally	x	-	43
Candice	x	-	42
Brittany	x	-	34
Merle	x	-	39
Chelsea	x	-	44
Tara	x	-	41
<b>Dorothy</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>75</b>
Eloise	x	-	53
Peggy	x	-	74
Hank	x	-	65
Meredith	x	-	48
Wanda	x	-	54
Deborah	x	-	46
Belinda	x	-	27
Stan	x	-	30
Prudence	x	-	31

***Chemical usage between rural and urban home gardeners***

Beatrice, of Wolfe County, discussed her desire to control the amounts of chemicals used in her gardening, “I know it’s not been sprayed down with godness knows what.” She does acknowledge, however, that she personally uses bug spray herself, though she does so judiciously.

“We don't use no more than we have to. *We have to spray the potato vines, but it didn't reach the potatoes.* We pick [potato bugs] off if we don't have too many...This year, we had to spray three different times. We had problems with the beans this year. It's some sort of a fungus—the agriculture extension claims it's a fungus in the ground. [The spray is] the same stuff you put on tobacco beds for blue mold. We plan on spraying the ground next year.” (Emphasis added by author.)

Frank in Wolfe County, discussed having a concern for bees that extended back to his mother's generation and predated modern environmental concerns; yet, despite this knowledge, admits he still uses insecticides.

“Believe it or not, 30-40 years ago, my mother was concerned about the environment. I'll tell you why, she said 'never dust or spray your beans or other things when they start blooming or it will kill the bees.' Now, I spray my cabbages, beans, broccoli, cauliflower, and potatoes for bugs. I can't raise a garden without it. But I never put on more than the amount it says and I always read the safety label. It says to wait seven days after spraying before you eat it, but I always double that time to be safe. I never spray my beans after the first bloom, and potatoes too...Roundup is a weed killer and I don't use that. Potato bugs are the hardest for me to kill. I have to switch every two years. The only guaranteed to get rid of potato bugs is this right here-(pinches fingers together repeatedly.)”

Mentioning a similar concern for the health of bees, Bridgette in Lawrence County stated, “People around here are having a lot of trouble with bees dying. People are just not sure why. I think they might put their beehives near the garden and then spray Sevin, I don't know.” Others in rural Kentucky held negative views on using pesticides or herbicides in the gardens, but were surprisingly flexible in using them if they felt the conditions warranted it As Polly, also of Wolfe County, noted,

“We try not to use chemicals. We've had problems in the past two or three years, with the tomatoes getting a blight, getting black spots, and then the vine turns yellow and dries up. We talked to an [agriculture] agent and they said to treat it with lime, so we did that and our tomatoes were better this year. *We ended up using some type of spray that [my husband] got at the store; I don't really know what it was.* I know it's non-harmful because he's paranoid about that, as well as I am, about making sure it's safe to use and recommended for tomatoes and vegetables. We didn't have any problems with potato bugs.” (Emphasis added by author.)

Nancy in Lawrence County, shared the story of her family using chemical inputs in their garden and details how their farming practice changed over time as toxics became a growing concern.

“When we were raising a garden in the 70s and 80s, we would get Sevin and dust our potatoes. Potato bugs were really really bad. Then we started hearing bad things about that. *We got more aware of cutting down on so much of that dusting, so my husband would get the bucket and it was back-breaking work, but he would shake those potato bugs into the bucket. The sad thing about that though, the bugs didn't get to survive (laughs), he burned them.* People started to hear things on the news about using chemicals and things—I don't really remember all the details. It started in the 80s when people began to hear a lot about that kind of stuff you'd use at home so he started trying other ways.” (Emphasis added by author.)

Nancy went on to say that she is more aware of the potential negative impacts of using pesticides and herbicides and how this knowledge has become more apparent over time.

Though she states she did not use bug spray that year, she discussed how her soil is so rich she did not need to add chemical fertilizers. She said she would not hesitate to use the fertilizer Miracle-Gro, a synthetic fertilizer manufactured by Scotts that is in fact, not an organic fertilizer, if she felt it necessary,

“Now people are getting more and more and more aware of chemically treated stuff and they're trying to stay away from it as much as possible. I know my garden, this year, I didn't put anything on it. I didn't spray for bugs. It was just planted and watered and hoed but I didn't even have fertilizer to put on it. I just watered it some. But my soil, I have really good, rich soil. *If I felt the need, I probably would have used some Miracle-Gro* but now you can find a lot of things that are safer to use on fruits and vegetables now. Compared to how they were back in the older days.” (Emphasis added by author.)

Beth, in Lawrence County, who discussed the difficulties in growing attached to the farm animals they relied upon for food as a child, does not use pesticides or herbicides in her garden today. Instead she uses natural pesticides like certain flowers that keep insects at bay.

“I like to see stuff grow and most of my garden is done organic. I don't use bug sprays. If you go out there and look at my poor green beans they're being eat up by something—I don't know what. Usually I grow marigolds, but I didn't do that this year. They keep the bugs away.”

When pressed to elaborate on why she grows food organically, she explained that her decision not to use the chemicals is actually influenced more by the weather (whether the season is extra rainy or not) and its impacts to the efficacy of using chemical inputs,

“I just think it's better. It's more healthier for you. I'm not sure a little Sevin dust is going to kill you, and we have used Sevin dust. I just haven't used it in the last couple years. Not really to be on the safe side, it's just like, *well, this year you'd be wasting your money to buy it because it rains every day. Sevin dust is something you have to have a few dry days.* And this has been a very, very wet spring.” (Emphasis added by author.)

What could explain this concern for the impacts of chemical inputs in one's home garden but continued usage of such chemicals? Why do those in rural areas tend to rely more on these chemicals than their urban counterparts? The most obvious explanation is that self-application gives the gardener control over the chemical input, whereas, the conventional agriculture system does not allow for this same level of control. Years of practice and maybe even traditional mixed-organic and chemical practices held over from their families could account for this discrepancy. Rural gardeners who judiciously apply chemicals like Sevin to their home gardens were on average, 64 years old (ages ranged from 48-76). Perhaps in the same way an artist learns the rule of composition only to subvert them, these rural farmers consider the rules of organic gardening as guides, but improvise as they see fit. This finding links back to findings from my first article which stated that many rural home gardeners and home food preservation practitioners do what they do out of a sense of maintaining tradition, while also expressing a desire to control their food. Here again, in these statements the rural home gardeners expressed some concerns for environmental issues but show through their judicious use of chemical inputs

that they are not driven to organic gardening. This finding could shed light on attempts to create organic food systems in rural Kentucky. From an economic development perspective, like Alice mentioned earlier, this presents an opportunity for the local food discourse to broaden beyond fully organic in order to include those who grow foods with admittedly far less chemical inputs, yet are not completely certifiably organic.

Another explanation takes into account the lifeworld of the home-gardeners particularly age and education. Those interviewed in the rural portion of this study have been gardening longer than those in the urban portion; the median age of rural gardeners was 62. This could explain how the rural practitioners are less concerned with the impacts of using synthetic pesticides and herbicides than the younger urban practitioners since they grew up in an era that prized the use of chemicals. Many of them came of age during the Green Revolution and “better living through science” of the late 1950s and 1960s. The younger, urban practitioners have been raised in a lifeworld that is more skeptical of synthetic chemicals and their connections to cancer and negative environmental impacts. As for education, none of the rural home-gardeners were trained in sustainable agriculture or environmental sustainability at the university level or for their careers. One rural home-gardener was also a full-time farmer and cattle breeder and he chooses to grow his food organically because he is concerned about the impacts of pesticides on the environment. He credits reading the magazine *Mother Earth News* since the late 1970s with his concerns. By comparison, as I discussed in my second article, a majority of the urban home-gardeners have studied issues of sustainable agriculture at university or for their career. This would explain how they could be more influenced by the critiques of pesticides and herbicides and therefore, opt not to use them. Advertising for chemical inputs is also pervasive and sometimes misleading. The chemical companies have colonized the lifeworld of agriculture by using their vast wealth and power to make their products readily available and cheaper than

organic pesticides/herbicides. Finding gardening soil or mulch at a garden supply store that does not have chemical additives already in it, is quite difficult. Like Nancy, some gardeners thought Miracle-Gro was a purely organic soil additive and did not consider it to be toxic like Sevin or Roundup, even though it is produced synthetically and manufactured by the Scotts Miracle-Gro Company and is not USDA certified organic.

### *Structural environmental concerns*

Let's now turn to the structural environmental concerns exhibited by the urban home-gardeners in the study. When discussing why she grows her own food, Sally in Fayette County shared her concern about the environmental and labor practices of many food companies,

“There's a website called Better World Shopper and it has a list of the ten worst companies and it ranks them by how they do things environmentally, labor wise, I don't remember all of the other categories but it deals with unions, treatment of workers... Most of the [bottled] water is owned by Nestle or Coca Cola. So you think, I'm not buying soda, I'm buying healthy water, but you're just killing somebody else's water source around the world. Those things are hard. Can you really live your life and never buy a bottled water?”

Kim, also in Fayette County speaks of her home gardening as being rooted in a complex rationality for larger systematic impacts. She discusses how she sees her self-provisioning as canceling-out the negatives of modern living and attempting to create a better world,

“We can create lots and lots of chaos or we can create good things and what does that look like? How do we measure creating those good things? We don't live off the grid, we still consume electricity that comes from coal that came from mountaintop removal, so what's that balance? It's trying to find those small ways we can make a difference.”

The chaos Kim alludes to in the previous statement could be explained by Peggy in Jefferson County who said,

“I am terribly, terribly distressed about the amounts of pesticides, herbicides, hormones—all of the nasty chemicals that are put on food of all kinds. Whether its meat or vegetables, I think we are poisoning our climate, I think we are poisoning ourselves. There was a point at which I thought, 'I cannot eat that poison food anymore'... at a certain point I started looking for organic produce and joined my first CSA between 20-30 years ago.”

Hank in Jefferson County shares a grim outlook and concern for systematic failure from our modern lifestyles in his explanation for why he lives as sustainably as possible,

“Too many people, climate change, too little fresh water, overuse of resources, overfishing of the oceans, salinization of our farmlands from irrigation, you name it. There's just too much and we're going to hit the wall.”

Deborah in Jefferson County also discussed larger impacts to the natural world, like climate change,

“Now there's the concern about climate change and mountaintop removal and destruction of too many green spaces—air quality, water quality, etc—I've learned more and more about how the list goes into my adult life.”

Erin in Fayette County discussed the complexities of realizing how the day-to-day often disconnects us from the natural world. She says her interest in home gardening and home food preservation are part of what she does to correct this imbalance.

“If you start thinking about how your behavior impacts other people and other systems- the bigger picture- there's a lot of things I do that are not as good as it could be. Like driving back and forth between Lexington and Louisville has a big impact because I'm driving a car that's producing emissions. I'm buying fuel and sitting in traffic for however long every day. I'm wasting all this time and resources. It's almost like I think about all the bad things I do and I'm like, what good things could I do? Knowing that your actions have an impact is one thing and trying to do something about that is another. So this is trying to *do* something. This is one of the more active things I can do to have a positive impact.”

These statements from the urban home-gardeners paint a picture of broad-reaching concern for issues of environmental sustainability. These gardeners situate their practice in a lifestyle that recognizes the role conventional agriculture plays in the non-sustainable aspects of our modern lives. Through gardening, they see themselves as contributing less to a system they



think is damaging to the natural world. They are keeping chemicals like pesticides and herbicides out of the natural environment and their food, they are relying less on the petroleum-dependent conventional agriculture system, and are contributing less to regional issues like drought and soil depletion. The likely reasons behind their structural concerns of environmental sustainability could be explained by the same forces found to shape their lifeworlds in article two—that urban gardeners discuss their resistance to the system's colonization of the lifeworld (industrialized agriculture) in more overt and academized ways than rural gardeners because of their educational training. This is likely due to their educational or career training in environmental science, sustainable agriculture, or experience working with organic farms. Rural home-gardeners alluded to awareness that pesticides and herbicides are not considered environmentally sustainable, and yet they sometimes use them judiciously. Perhaps with more educational outreach efforts focusing on organic gardening, rural home-gardeners might also discontinue their intermittent use of chemicals in their gardens.

Alice's comment on prioritizing local food production over organic provides an interesting exception to what Andrew Sasz calls "inverted environmental quarantine" (Sasz, 2007, pp. 2). Inverted environmental quarantine is the hyper-awareness of environmental toxins that lead some people, mostly affluent, to protect themselves through their consumer choices. Sasz says this is the opposite of a social movement and is fatalistic because it is an individualized response to a collective threat and does nothing to change the overall system which is creating an environment full of toxic threats to food, water, air, and the human body. Alice illustrates an exception to inverted environmental quarantine because though she truly believes there are health risks for consuming non-organically raised foods, she accepts those

risks in order to change the food system. For Alice, she values the economic development that results from supporting local farmers, even if those local farmers sometimes use pesticides or cannot afford to become certified organic.

### **Future Research**

While attitudes of biophilia could not be said to directly promote environmentally sustainable behaviors, research should be done that examines the ability of a practice like home gardening in building capacity for changes in environmental attitudes over time. This could be done by establishing a baseline of findings regarding reported behaviors and opinions, and then surveying them over time to determine if their behaviors and opinions change over prolonged periods of participating in home gardening. Further research could also be done to examine the impacts of pesticides and herbicides on small-scale agriculture production such as the home-garden and the extent of knowledge about chemical inputs among home-gardeners.

This article does not address issues of land access and the “aging out” of home gardeners in rural areas. Future work will examine the self-provisioning food practices of those in urban areas with little access to land. In this study, home gardens of significant scale (enough to feed one family) were more prevalent in rural Kentucky due to access of land. A cursory drive through Wolfe and Lawrence counties reveals countryside dotted with home-gardens full of vegetables, regardless of the perceived wealth of the homeowners. Mobile homes are just as likely to have a home garden in the yard as a middle class brick ranch home, and perhaps more likely to if truths hold about home gardening as a way of piecing together livelihoods (Halperin, 1990). Both rural and urban Kentuckians living in apartment homes with little access to land could be participating in community gardens, container gardens, or might find their participation in local agriculture limited to CSA memberships. The average home gardener in

rural Kentucky was found to be older than those in urban Kentucky so more work must be done to discover more about young home-gardeners in rural Kentucky.

## **Conclusion**

All participants interviewed for this study indicated a sense of biophilia in either their past or present practices of home-gardening. An indication of biophilia does not, however, lead directly to behaviors of environmental sustainability. This research has demonstrated the two share a complex relationship. One might have a strong sense of biophilia yet also utilize pesticides even after discussing how damaging they might be to the environment. There appears to be a sense among many of the rural gardeners that judicious use of pesticides and herbicides is okay as long as one follows the directions and uses them as a last resort. This could reflect the differences, again, in the lifeworlds that urban and rural home-gardeners occupy. One aspect of home gardening rises to the surface—control. Rural home-gardeners discussed a desire to control the amount of chemicals or additives to their foods through self-application of chemicals “as needed.” On the contrary, most urban gardeners eschewed the use of pesticides and discussed environmental sustainability in systematic terms that explored the connection between conventional agriculture practices and issues like drought, climate change, and exposures to pesticides/herbicides. It follows that urban home-gardeners who were trained in sustainable agriculture would be more concerned with chemical pesticides than rural home-gardeners who were not educated in the same way. Urban gardeners concerned with systemic issues of environmental sustainability placed their practice of self-provisioning into a framework that sought to restore balance and reconnect them to the natural world. Home-gardening enabled them to feel some sort of control over the seemingly out of control issues of climate change, salinization of soil, droughts, and exposures to chemicals in their foods they have learned about through their educational or career experiences.

While attitudes of biophilia were not directly found to predict environmentally sustainable behaviors in this study, future work could reveal important connections between the practice and building capacity for sustainable actions. Much like biophobia can be a feedback loop for increasing environmental degradation, I still posit that biophilia can be stoked through practices of home-gardening. Home gardening and home food preservation should be added to other local food movement initiatives not only to address food access, but to also improve overall health. People are overworked, stressed, and disconnected from nature while highly connected through social media and technology. Gardening gets one outside in nature and is the most visceral expression of our connection to the natural world. Watching a seed sprout and mature into a fruit-bearing plant, then seeing it pass back into the earth as compost can be transformative, especially for youth. This idea after all, is the basis of the farm-to-school movement. From the physical exercise of manual labor, to the sunshine on one's back—the process of home gardening offers a plethora of healing properties. Growing, then preserving as many foods at home as possible reduces food waste and puts the control of food production back into the hands of those who have the most incentive to do things more sustainably—the person who will consume the food in their local space. Through this cooperative relationship between humans and their natural world, biophilia can be fostered. Even if a sense of biophilia was not found to directly influence environmentally sustainable behaviors in this work, in the least, it demonstrated that those who garden do have close connections to the natural world. This appreciation of nature is as good a place to start as any for taking the next steps toward a more sustainable environment.

## Chapter 4

### **Home Gardening and Home Food Preservation in Kentucky: Self-Provisioning for Tradition and for the Future**

Wrapping up a research project I have worked on these last five years of my life is as exciting as I had imagined. Now, more than ever, the time is right for discussions of home food preservation and home gardening. Since 2009, the practice of home food preservation has grown in popularity in Fayette County, where I currently reside; and I am now volunteering with a group to coordinate home food preservation classes for interested community members. The future for self-provisioning and local foods look bright from my perspective. Many great people are working hard every day to shape our local food system and build resiliency in our communities. I hope this work will offer insights for those looking to create local food programs centered on self-provisioning in their communities. I also hope to answer with my own future research the questions raised in the three preceding articles.

In the first article, a sense of tradition was found to be the primary motivating factor for home food preservation practitioners in Wolfe and Lawrence Counties. Though the practitioners also expressed concerns for controlling additives and chemicals in their food system, they continued the practice primarily out of a sense of tradition and habit—because it was something they had always done. The majority of rural practitioners, by and large, offered a pessimistic view of the future of home food preservation, describing it as “a dying artform.”

The second article revealed that in comparison to rural practitioners, urban home food preservation practitioners were motivated by a sense of place, concerns about the environment, and a politicized ethical opposition to the conventional agriculture system. They were more positive about the future of home food preservation and thought the practice would continue to

rise in popularity as more and more people grow aware of environmental issues and industrial agriculture's practices. The taken-for-granted lifeworlds of the rural practitioners explained the lack of politicized discourse surrounding their motives for practicing home food preservation.

The last article explored the concept of biophilia and the connections both rural and urban home gardeners experienced with the natural world through their practice. Though all forty study participants indicated feelings of biophilia connected with their home gardening, those in rural Kentucky demonstrated a complex relationship between stated concerns of environmental sustainability (as measured through the use of pesticides/herbicides) and actual actions, often judiciously using these chemicals. The pervasiveness and the marketing of synthetic pesticide and herbicide manufacturers lead home-gardeners concerned with the health or environmental impacts to still rely upon them. In this way, we can see that these chemical companies have colonized the lifeworld in that they use their size and political influence to maintain market dominance and limit their competition from organic pesticides/herbicides. Urban Kentucky home-gardeners, perhaps because of their lifeworlds, which included more training in sustainable agriculture, were far more likely to forgo pesticides and herbicides and considered their actions part of a larger structural response to issues of environmental sustainability. In the end, attitudes of biophilia could not function as a predictor for sustainable behaviors, yet could stand on their own as an end result of home-gardening and function as a means to reconnect us with the natural world.

### **Food Relocalization Efforts: Here to Stay?**

Evidence of a food revolution appears to truly be afoot. But will these concerns and food relocalization efforts truly continue into the future? Every age has experienced an ebb and flow; the dance toward modernity balanced by calls for reform. For nearly every period of increased technological innovation, an opposing force has surfaced with claims of solving the associated

ills. These are like hiccups in the long view of U.S. history. Some of these hiccups have lasting impacts, but largely, the cycles continue in the direction toward modernity with its increased reliance upon technology and alienation from the natural world. The Victorian Era had its health gurus, fountains of youth, and directives that fresh rural air could cure the pains of modern city life. World War I was the mother of food invention as citizens were urged to grow and can their own foods. Post WWII, the corporate creation Betty Crocker eased the American housewife's acceptance of convenience foods in her kitchen, birthing the modern industrial food system. The late 1960's counter culture swung the pendulum the other way—rebellious against corporate power, expectations of female homemakers, and concerns for the use of chemicals in the Green Revolution. We have removed actual cocaine from our Coca-Cola (1932), declared a war on fat in the American diet (1960s), later decided too many carbohydrates were the problem (1970s and 1980s), and are now shunning sugar with our Paleo diets that urge us to go *way* back to the land. As a modern society we have come back-to-the-land many times and yet, we ended up with the consolidated conventional food system we have now through the colonizing forces that shape of collective lifeworlds.

Changes to this system will take monumental feats of critical thinking, resource consolidation, political leadership, system overhaul, economic reform, and unprecedented political participation of citizens. Unlike in ages past, the American populace is fighting an obesity epidemic while confronting the social environments that make changing our food system difficult. Those lucky enough to be employed full time often work increasingly sedentary jobs. Others piece together multiple, part-time jobs which contribute to time deficits and increased reliance upon processed foods. Even given the time, most Americans now lack the food knowledge necessary to grow and cook meals at home. Our steep increase in obesity is matched with the highest rate of income inequality ever experienced in this country. With the

majority of Americans lacking the money or power to create systematic change does our society truly have a chance of turning these food revolution experiments into lasting change? Can we move to a more just and inclusive food system where healthy foods are found in all towns, regardless of race or income? In our time-pressed society is it possible that more people will take up home gardening and home food preservation? The following case studies offer illustrate actions that make me confident this current foray into self-provisioning has the potential to create lasting change.

### **The Hope: Case Studies of Community**

Throughout the course of this research, I learned more about people in my state who are working hard to do wonderful, selfless acts. All of them were wonderful, gracious people who took time out of their busy lives to talk with me and allow me into their homes. Nearly all of them are doing remarkable work, but a few of them are working above and beyond to use the medium of food to build community or address the issues of economic, racial, and class injustices that are present in food availability issues. The following case studies stand out for these specific reasons because they focus on people who saw a need in their community, formed a plan to address it, and are working hard for to improve their communities. They are exceptions to what Sasz described as inverted environmental quarantine, and instead, foster a sense of community through their actions. Hopefully, these stories will offer ideas for those wanting to change the food landscape in each their own community.

#### ***Frank's community kitchen in Wolfe County***

Frank lives in a brick, ranch-style home. The yard was neatly manicured and the backyard was mostly taken up by a large garden. At first glimpse, one would never imagine Frank has the equivalent of a community kitchen in his basement, along with an impressive handmade shelving unit stocked to the brim with colorful canned goods. During harvest season,



one will find Frank along with his various family members and friends working long hours in the evenings and on weekends to preserve all they grew through the summer. Frank runs his kitchen in a very organized approach—he could tell me the exact number of quarts and pints he “put away” last year and how many he expects to preserve this year. He sets up work stations for the various steps needed to preserve the food and keeps everything running like a nicely wound clock—steady and efficient.

When I first interviewed Frank, his canning season had passed so he invited me back to help him and his friends prepare their frozen sweet corn the following summer. His basement was outfitted with two stoves, a handmade drying rack he uses to speed-dry apples over his stovetop burners, stainless steel preparation tables he bought from a commercial kitchen going out of business, and several pressure canners. Frank delightfully showed me the various models of pressure canners, some newer than others. Plopping the heavy weights into my hands he said, “you can't find these anymore! These were my mother's.” The cold, heavy metal of those weights were substantive. I found myself thinking, “these days you can't find stuff as well-made as this” and was happy that my own mother had given me her pressure canner and weight.

When I asked Frank about his basement canning kitchen and why the folks involved work together he said,

“I could tend this and put up enough to take care of me and my family, and Beatrice could do the same. So could Samantha and Terry, but for us, it's a social event. It's not work. It *is* work, but we don't see it as work. We look forward to working together.”

Since 1984 Frank's basement kitchen has created a sense of community that extends outside the walls of his home. People have asked him for green beans and he has invited them to come pick them from his garden. He jokes that many of his offers are met with refusals, as the requester would rather be given the quarts of canned green beans fully processed by Frank. For this reason, Frank was skeptical that home gardening and home food preservation would

continue. He fears that people will opt for convenience over the hard work. Yet, for 30 years his network of cousins and neighbors have gathered into his basement to cut corn from the cob, stuff freezer bags, break beans, wash and prepare jars, and step back to look at their finished products. These individuals have gathered for decades to do this work because they enjoy the social aspects of it. In Frank's own words, they don't see it as work. If one can see a task as fun instead of a chore, that has potential for bringing in more community members as time goes by.

### ***Meredith's food justice and Stan's food literacy work in Jefferson County***

In addition to providing community supported agricultural products for people on a sliding price scale in Louisville, Meredith's organization offers lectures on food justice and environmental justice. The lessons learned in these lectures spark discussions, according to Meredith, and for her they help connect the dots of issues she had long been aware of. Here, Meredith discusses the importance of food literacy and explains how she connects larger structural issues like food sources in Louisville's West End with her own health concerns. In this quote, she demonstrates the intersections of socioeconomic status, race, and justice.

“I work two jobs, I don't get to attend church on most Sundays. For me to give back, to the community and to God, I feel like He'll bless me for what I am doing. It's a spiritual thing for me, that I'm able to help someone or family to eat local because I live down the street from the [organization] here and in the West End, they don't have a lot of organic food in the stores. They're beginning to get it in the stores. I shop outside the neighborhood, I would go to the Highlands or Shelbyville Road to get food at the Kroger. You're talking a 30 minute drive. I felt it was worth it. I would go to Indiana too. They offered a different kind, or grade of food. The food was almost rotten when it got to the neighborhoods around here. We have some corner stores; their produce was just rotten. I felt like it shouldn't be because of the color of my skin, that you're going to make a difference in the kind of food that I eat and dictate to me, basically trying to control what I eat. There are 17-18 restaurants on Broadway coming to the West End. They don't have anything healthy for me. My parents, as they got older, my mom developed diabetes and heart disease. My dad developed heart disease. I made a promise to myself, I wasn't going to develop diabetes or heart disease.”

Unpacking all the complexities in this statement, Meredith explains how the West End lacks the organic food choices she finds in the more affluent Highlands and Shelbyville Road

stores. By saying that her food availability is limited by the color of her skin, and that her food choices are “dictated to her” she is making a statement rooted in an social understanding of racism and desire for food justice. Since the West End is less affluent, economic justice is a large part of the issue here. Food availability in her community lacks organic options but offers ample fast food options. She stated her parent's health issues include diabetes and heart disease, both metabolic diseases greatly influenced by food choices. These food choices are largely based on availability. In making a promise to herself that she would not also develop these health issues, she is driven to work toward changing the food landscape and availability in her community. She explained in the beginning that her participation in the organization was her way of giving back to the community. It is something she does that allows her to feel charitable, enough so that she states her work at the organization balances her being unable to attend church. This implies that her concerns and work toward organic food availability is driven by a sense of ethics and doing the right thing—a powerful sense of motivation.

This motivation based in her ethical worldview keeps her involved despite her busy schedule. I reflected about my meeting with Meredith in my field notes and looking back, I feel it is important to include this story of her organization because in it, I make the assertion that this type of community-initiative could be a successful model for food programs developing in Eastern Kentucky.

“When I first arrive at the Lutheran church where Meredith's organization meets, I see her before I know who she is. She is talking on the phone, looking every bit as busy as she explained to me she would be during our phone screen. Walking past her, smiling because I think that might be her and also because I look like a tourist with a tripod sticking out of my tote, I enter the church. The room is all bustling—brown paper bags of food, deep violet eggplants on the table, kids playing amongst adult chatter, the smell of warm bread and garlic floating through the air. In the kitchen a chef and volunteer are sweating, bustling, chopping, serving, and instructing the shareholders about the recipe they are demonstrating. That day the warm bread and garlic smells were coming from a bruschetta made of squash and late summer vegetables. The demonstration seems to be a key component—showing patrons exciting, easy recipes they can make using the

ingredients in their bags. It sparks creativity and addresses questions of what to do with a surplus of one ingredient, like squash. Samples were displayed on a large plate. The samples were popular—the chef had a difficult time keeping the tray full. Looking around this room in West Louisville, I could imagine something like this being successful back home in Eastern Kentucky. With its multi-generational makeup, its income-contingent CSA approach, the use of a church as a meeting space, and its cooking demonstrations this organization was something special. Existing in a period where local food initiatives have varying degrees of success, this looked like it was most definitely working.”

Meredith's organization offers a glimpse into an organized approach at structuring community supported agriculture to the community it serves. Participants there, much like Frank's community canners, enjoy the social aspect of the weekly meet-up. In addition to the food, classes or presentations on food justice, environmental justice, and nutrition meet specific community needs.

Stan, also in Louisville, is similarly providing information to meet the needs of students in his community. As the teacher of the first ever food literacy course at his school, Stan and another teacher have developed courses for their students which weave together the science of nutrition, the sociology of food, and cooking skills. I asked Stan what drives his desire to focus on food issues with his students and why he grows his own food,

“It’s going to be a more important skill into the future. The price of our food system is going to catch up with it. The cheapness of our food is not permanent. What I really hope is that in communities these skills stay alive and can be passed on, because if they are forgotten there is going to be a lot of people that are hurting. When we lose cooking skills in one generation, that next generation isn't able to take advantage of that education and prepare cheap meals from scratch and it’s harder on that family. I think it’s going to be that way for food preservation where it gives you the diversity of knowledge to be able to deal with a multitude of environments and situations. I hope I'm wrong, but I think it’s going to get tough for people.”

As obesity rates increase and concerns over food additives like sugar are linked with poor health in the United States, I heard practitioners in both rural and urban Kentucky discuss

concerns similar to Stan's and stressed the importance of being able to control additives in their home preserved foods. In his food literacy class Stan uses creative ways to spark a change in thinking among students. This includes having students eat like a diabetic would for one day, wear a 75 pound backpack in order to see how weight impacts one's mobility, or has students cut soda from their diet for one experimental day. He sees the ability to help students make these larger connections between food and health with the connections throughout all their learning and subjects. He explains one way he starts conversations about good nutrition and our food choices,

“We have a baby food project. When you ask someone what do you feed a baby, they automatically say the best nutritional choices. I found out, it’s not ignorance of what is good nutrition, it’s actually doing it and acting on it. We studied baby food and we made our own and presented it. Right now they are working on essays that look at when that switch occurs—from knowing what good nutrition is and doing it, to knowing what good nutrition is and not doing it, not fulfilling that for yourself. Hopefully they can offer some insights on that.”

Overall, Stan's students have responded in largely positive ways to the food literacy and cooking classes. Their test scores have risen from some of the lowest in the county to the highest. They join Stan in making presentations at regional conferences to share their knowledge and class project approaches and, in this author's opinion, are more poised than most other high school students their age. They are excited to go to school for Stan's classes, and Stan is excited to be there teaching them.

Frank's community kitchen, Meredith's organization, and Stan's food literacy teaching approach offer ideas for individuals looking to improve their community and are exemplary because they highlight the actions anyone can take. Whether it is one man in his basement canning and building community with family and neighbors, a neighborhood of people transforming their food landscape together, or a teacher with the determination to help his students be healthier food literate citizens, all of these individuals used the limited resources

they possessed. They have worked diligently to keep their programs or activities going despite fluctuating levels of interest, hard work required from all DIY enterprises, and in spite of a society that constantly shows us a path of least resistance.

As discussed in the third article, here too we see these examples pose an exception to Sasz's inverted environmental quarantine. Instead of simply relying on the ability to protect their health by buying organic foods, Frank, Meredith, and Stan are working to change the structure in their own separate ways. For Frank it is the building of community which takes self-provisioning from the realm of the individual to the community through providing a space for group work. Meredith is challenging the racism inherent in the food desert status of her neighborhood through participating in environmental justice courses and working with her organization to make sure organic, local food is economically viable and available for her neighbors. Stan is working with the future leaders of his community to teach them about the interconnections of our food system and its impacts on health. In these ways, Frank, Meredith, and Stan are collectively responding to what they see as threats to our health, environment, and communities.

In summary, it seems all we can do, like Wanda from Jefferson County, is hope for the best, be positive, and provide the skills people will need to rely on as we work through the challenges facing our civilization.

“Your generation has brought some wonderful changes, so many kids want to be farmers and are doing fun, environmental things. I think it’s very encouraging. How long? So many people in my generation started out thinking they wanted to go back to the land, well you know the thing, they all wound up on Wall Street. Well I didn't, but you know. The lifelong commitment is hard to tell, but it’s exciting to me that in each generation there is a group, and I think there is a pretty big group this time, are taking the environmental challenges that are presented to them pretty seriously. As an educator, we need to teach the young children because it’s tough to teach the middle age people to change their eating habits. Teach them to can. It’s hard to say at this point. There's been a food revolution in this country, we're in the middle of it, the way people eat in my lifetime has changed drastically, so I have to be positive.”

We can make predictions about the longevity of Kentucky food localization and self-provisioning efforts, but we can never truly know the scope of our actions until we look back from some future standpoint. What we do know for certain is that food stories resonate with people; foodways connect us to a sense of place—complicated relationships and all. Many people seek to continue their long held food traditions and take pleasure in controlling their self-provisioned foodstuffs. Others practice home-gardening and home food preservation to behave as sustainably as they can, seeking a life that treads lightly on the earth.

Policymakers and economic development proponents could use this research to better understand what motivates people in Kentucky to conduct self-provisioning. Areas with a history of subsistence agriculture might seem to have high potential for successful value-added agricultural products like home processed goods—jams, pickles, salsas, and the like. It is important for those trying to create programs that support value-added production to realize that many home food preservers in rural Kentucky value the sense of community that comes from sharing food and might be resistant to selling the fruits of their labor. This research can also inform agriculture extension agents looking to conduct home food preservation workshops on the importance of recognizing the oral tradition of food preservation knowledge, particularly in rural Kentucky. The lack of reference to USDA food preservation practices could potentially pose food borne illnesses, as some practitioners might not process the foods for the safest amount of time. Future research should be done to examine whether home-gardening and home food preservation make people healthier. A longitudinal study examining practitioners that accessed both sociocultural practices and health indicators could shed much light on this issue. Additionally, exploring the intersections of race, class, place, and gardening in Black communities by examining the influence of slavery, tenant farming, and land access on

practices of home food production could yield important work in this subject area that would add to food localization literature.

This research shows us that while rural and urban Kentucky are obviously different, there are opportunities for an interplay between the two; not only geographically, but generationally as well. The main differences regarding motivations for practicing home food preservation and home-gardening between the rural and urban practitioners reside largely in their taken-for-granted lifeworlds. Lifeworlds are shaped by many generational factors that shift over time, such as political economy and social norms. In this study, we see a difference in older practitioners understanding the implications of pesticides and herbicides but choosing to use them judiciously. Younger practitioners here pride themselves on avoiding these chemicals and opt for organic foods. The older generation has the long-held, expert knowledge of home food preservation while the younger generation has the most up to date information on the pros and cons of the industrial food system. Melding the rural and urban, the young and old, through community canning workshops and gardening projects could further contribute to a sense of community in Kentucky, and likely other locations as well. The propensity for food bringing people together in this way is not only a possibility, but something we should strive for.



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