

## Food Policies Empowering Democratic and Epistemic Self-Determination

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National and international food policy makers must balance a wide variety of goals, some of which can easily be mutually realized, and some of which are in considerable tension with one another. These goals can include health and safety for consumers, such as the policies governing the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service.<sup>1</sup> These goals can also include food security for consumers, defined as reliable access to a wide variety of nutritious and safe food,<sup>2</sup> which is addressed by various policies of food assistance. Food policy also has goals around supporting the economic sustainability of producers and distributors, pursued with policies like agricultural grants,<sup>3</sup> as well as supporting environmental sustainability through policies on land use, fertilizer application, and the like.<sup>4</sup> Another suite of goals concerns just treatment for workers at all points along the food chain, which is pursued by laws governing everyone from farmworkers<sup>5</sup> to meat packers<sup>6</sup> to fast-food employees. Sometimes policies pursue these goals individually, and so may be at cross-purposes to one-another, such as when the USDA funded research and marketing for Domino's Pizza to use more cheese to support U.S. dairy interests while also having policies to promote better nutrition and less fat consumption.<sup>7</sup> At other times policies balance multiple goals, such as the USDA purchasing commodities from farmers in the United States to distribute to schools, food-banks, and households.<sup>8</sup>

The policies used to pursue these different goals vary widely, and these variations in policy promote quite different practices. Given the different possible food policies which might be enacted, it is possible to analyze and evaluate these policies not only by how well they realize their stated goals, but also what community and individual practices are support. Of course, a similar point could be made about other issues which bring together complex policy goals with multiple stakeholders within governments, businesses, communities, and groups of individuals. However, because of the universal nature of food (everybody consciously engages with food every day, often in more than one way as a producer, consumer, preparer, and so on), the importance of food to cultural and personal identity,<sup>9</sup> and the ways in which food implicates many social-ecological systems and political institutions,<sup>10</sup> it has the possibility of being an extremely powerful "boundary object" which can bring together multiple perspectives and forms of expertise.<sup>11</sup> As an important book on the food justice movement says, the

vibrant and growing activist discourse around food justice “resonates with many groups and can be invoked to expand the support base for bringing about community change *and* a different kind of food system.”<sup>12</sup> Thus food policies have an exceptional potential to benefit or harm the wider society, and so deserve special attention.

This potential for food to be a powerful lever for social analysis and change is well recognized in the food sovereignty movement. Activists working in food sovereignty use food and the food system as a platform for a wide array of justice-based critiques of society, and as a way to center communities’ fight for survival and self-determination. The discourses on food sovereignty offer a powerful example of how food systems can support or undermine oppressed communities, but that discourse has not sufficiently engaged in fine-grained examinations of particular food policies as opposed to larger critiques of oppressive societies. At the same time, those working to craft and improve food policies have insufficiently engaged with the ability of food systems to affect communities and individuals.

This paper will argue for evaluating food policies in terms of the degree to which they increase self-determination for individuals and communities, and will focus specifically on epistemic self-determination. Section 1 will discuss the value of self-determination, and section 2 will argue that an important but often unrecognized form of this is epistemic self-determination. With this framework in place, sections 3 and 4 will briefly look at some food policies in the United States, and show that, whereas some are likely to support the epistemic aspects of self-determination, others are more likely to increase dependence on distant experts in ways which undercut those forms of self-determination. This paper will not generate a full evaluation of the broad spectrum of food policies, which exist at national, regional, and local levels. However it will use a few examples from the United States context to illustrate the concepts in the paper, and those illustrations will suggest what such a comprehensive analysis might look like. Ultimately, this paper argues that food policies which work through empowerment ought to be pursued, particularly by and for marginalized or oppressed communities, both on participatory justice as well as effectiveness grounds. Further, those which work through disempowerment ought to be campaigned against. Food policies and food systems have the potential to support epistemic self-determination in ways which increase community and individual flourishing and political power or not, and this is an important but underexamined normative element of food policy.

## 1. Self-Determination

Self-determination is an ambiguous concept without a clear definition or agreement on what entities can possess it. Rather than national sovereignty or some other competing concept, self-determination in this paper refers to the concept as it is often used in food sovereignty discourse, which is one focused on

the survival, flourishing, and just arrangements of communities, viewed through a lens of food systems. Self-determination in this sense includes the ability of a community to effectively engage in joint projects which are important to the communities' members, particularly ones which promote the survival and flourishing of the community. This concept of self-determination also includes a goal of participatory justice for the community and its projects.

It is worth examining this sense of self-determination further. Communities are often seen by activists, and increasingly by academics, as important sites of injustices and harms on the one hand,<sup>13</sup> or objects of value and important components of individuals' lives on the other.<sup>14</sup> The kinds of communities referred to in these discourses have several important characteristics. The first such characteristic is joint projects. People often engage in projects which can only be achieved jointly, or which benefit from the help of cooperation. A community in the sense referred to in the food sovereignty discourse will have the characteristic of being a nexus of many joint projects, some perhaps pursued by the entire community, but many including a subset of community members. A second characteristic is identity. Many members of a community identify themselves as members of the community, and consider the community's flourishing to be important to them. Both of these characteristics are important for this paper because they argue for self-determination for communities.<sup>15</sup>

That many projects are located within a community, and could not be pursued by an individual, means that there is what scholars have described as "communal freedom" or "collective capabilities" over and above individuals' freedoms and capabilities. As Ian Carter says in his *A Measure of Freedom* (1999), these are "freedom of a group of individual agents to perform a set of agentially distinct action... in combination"<sup>16</sup> which he and other scholars point out could not be performed by any individual,<sup>17</sup> and which facilitate many individual capabilities or freedoms as well.<sup>18</sup> These freedoms can themselves be understood as part of self-determination as term is used in this paper. If we grant that social institutions have a prima facie duty to promote freedoms or capabilities for members of the society, then promoting the self-determination of a community to determine coordinated projects and achieve them is an important part of that duty.

Many people see their own identity as co-constructed with their community, and see the community flourishing as a good they wish to pursue.<sup>19</sup> Self-determination in the sense it is used in food justice and sovereignty discourses is focused in large part on communities coming together and deciding what their collective vision for the community is, and deciding on and executing projects to further that vision. Thus, increased self-determination means a greater ability to pursue this widely shared goal. If we grant that social institutions also have a prima facie duty to support members of that society in pursuing goals in line with their conceptions of the good, then promoting the self-determination of a community to determine its identity and promote its flourishing is an important part of that duty as well.

The considerations above highlight reasons for a society to support at least some degree of self-determination for communities even in an ideally just world. As we will see below in the discussion of epistemic self-determination, there are also reasons for a marginalized or oppressed community in our non-ideal world to seek self-determination as a way of better participating in decisions within the larger society.

The above considerations also foreground the importance of justice within and between these communities. If some members of the community are not able to participate in determining or pursuing joint projects, or if their ideas are not included in the vision of community flourishing, then there is little reason to think an unjust “self-determination” would be of much use. On instrumentalist grounds a group with internal participatory justice can make the group better at achieving their joint goals and in determining goals which capture as many interests of the members as possible.<sup>20</sup> This is in addition to the inherent value of participatory justice as a procedural goal which is often present in the food sovereignty discourse.<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, some of the thornier parts of the discourses on democratic legitimacy or participatory justice are avoided because communities as conceived of in these discourses are not stable nation-states, but smaller groups of affinity, without formal membership criteria or laws. Thus the tensions about whether membership (however defined), an “all-subjected” principle, or an “all-affected” principle<sup>22</sup> should ground democratic legitimacy can be eased. People who often engage in some of the collaborative projects, the nexus of which forms the community, and who identify with the community and seek to have it flourish, ought to have a say in those projects and the collective vision of the community. This is similar to a membership criteria for democratic legitimacy but does not presuppose some formalized rules for membership.

It also takes into account the fact that “all-subjected” stakeholders in a community of affinity would mostly be applicable to those either engaged in joint projects (and therefore subject to others’ intentions and actions in the project) or who identify strongly with the community (and therefore have a stake in what the collective vision for the community’s future is). Of course, there will be many affected by a community’s projects who would not have a say in this sense. However, an “all-affected” criterion for full participation has several problems, such as the so-called “butterfly effect” of unlimited affectedness, the problem of shifting borders, and so on.<sup>23</sup> For many working in issues of food sovereignty, this tension is resolved through solidarity with others, a situation in which communities support one another’s struggles both materially and emotionally, and see the rights and interests of individuals not in the community, as well as other communities and their members, as things which ought to be supported wherever possible, and which act as constraints on any one community’s actions.<sup>24</sup>

This sense of self-determination found among food sovereignty activists is similar to Carol Gould’s concept of democratic self-determination as a mode of

organizing common activities, which better fleshes out questions of participatory justice within and between these communities. As Gould says, self-determination in this sense is included within democracy, understood as “a requirement of equal rights of participation in decision making on the part of all those engaged in a common activity, defined by shared goals.” An individual’s rights in a democracy to freely determine her own activities require that no individual has (*prima facie*) a right to determine joint or shared activities more than any other participant. Thus, shared or joint activities must be codetermined along democratic lines, which Gould calls self-determination by the collectivity. The only restrictions on this *prima facie* equal participation are justice claims to being more affected by particular decisions for particular stakeholders (recall the member/solidarity difference above).<sup>25</sup> In today’s globalized economies, for example, this may well mean that distant stakeholders such as marginalized subsistence farmers have a more fundamental claim to restricting the actions of a food security policy than do the powerful experts and farmers in dominant societies. This conception of self-determination balances the goals of individual and community autonomy with the importance of cooperation, solidarity, and just relations within and between communities.<sup>26</sup> It also has the advantage of drawing on goals already present in policy and law on the one hand and activism on the other. As Gould says, people’s development of capacities, building of relationships, and fulfillment of long-term goals depends both on their own choices, individual or joint, and on the availability of the means for their freedom to become effective, where several of these means are specified in human rights. We can rightly be critical when these prerequisites are not provided through social and political organization, which instead should aim to fulfill them.<sup>27</sup>

In policy, self-determination is explicitly recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>28</sup> as well as the United Nations Charter.<sup>29</sup> Further, because this conception of self-determination requires participation by individuals and communities in decisions which affect them, it also speaks to the growing acknowledgment in policy discourses of the importance of participation in policy formation and implementation. The USDA has an explicit commitment to informing stakeholders and obtaining input from them, particularly around controversial issues like the Farm Bill<sup>30</sup> and animal welfare.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the National Research Council in the United States has repeatedly<sup>32</sup> called for participation of the public with scientists and policymakers in risk decisions at “every step of the process that informs risk decisions.”<sup>33</sup> This emphasis on participation is justified in part on justice grounds on behalf of public stakeholders as well as making policies “more democratic, legitimate, and informative for decision participants,” and in part because it makes policies and decision making for these organizations more effective “by improving problem formulation, [and] providing more knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> It can also improve the interactions between stakeholder communities and experts by “determining appropriate uses for controversial analytic techniques, clarifying views, and making decisions more acceptable.”<sup>35</sup> As we will see in the next section, self-

determination increases the ability of both individuals and communities to meaningfully participate in these decisions.

In social justice discourse among activists, particularly in food justice, it is well recognized that self-determination in the sense we are using it is important in itself and necessary to avoid other injustices. For example, the Nyéléni Declaration, one of the first explications of food sovereignty, is concerned with injustices in economic relations, gender relations, the preservation of marginalized cultures, land reform, and a host of other issues brought together by food practices. To address these issues, the declaration calls for putting control of food systems locally, which includes building up “local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems, developing research systems to support this, . . . and reject[ing] technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these,” as well as “promot[ing] positive interaction . . . that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Michael Menser describes the food sovereignty movement, and La Via Campesina (the organization that drafted the Nyéléni Declaration) in particular as engaging in a form of maximally participatorily just democracy, which he describes as “MaxD.” For Menser, MaxD is committed to “(1) democratic self-determination; (2) capacity development for individuals and groups; (3) delivery of economic, social, and/or political benefits; and (4) the construction, cultivation, proliferation, and interconnection of movements and organizations that embody the first three tenets.”<sup>37</sup> This balance of maximal local autonomy with just relations within and between communities is at the heart of this self-determination as it is understood by Gould and food sovereignty activists.

Before moving on, it is worth first briefly addressing a possible tension in drawing on food sovereignty discourses to suggest policy evaluation and reform. Many food justice activists would presumably welcome the intervention of social institutions to support the increase of epistemic and other forms of self-determination. However, there are also trends within food justice which are concerned with building alternatives to, and perhaps being actively opposed to, state, corporate, and other social institutions. Given this, one may well wonder if policy changes are the right focus for a food justice movement or would even be welcome by activists. For example, the food sovereignty movement, and particularly La Via Campesina, focuses on putting control of food systems locally, and recognizes that “local” community control often crosses geopolitical borders.<sup>38</sup> Their focus is not on reforming institutions, especially the state, to include them more in deliberative discourse before enacting policy. Instead, food sovereignty supports communities engaging in political actions outside of reason-giving and deliberation to also include actions like socio-ecological sustainable food production, to build concrete alternatives. As Menser points out, the food sovereignty movement “aims to cultivate and proliferate an alternative model of agricultural production and a corresponding political program,” one which “draws upon local and traditional knowledge in combination with

laboratory studies to farm in such a way as to meet local cultural needs, provide for human health and conserve biodiversity."<sup>39</sup> This is a program of community self-determination and self-development independent of social institutions, following the commitments laid out in Menser's definition of MaxD above. It is not a program of engaging with those institutions to reform them. For such a movement, what role does policy evaluation and critique have to play?

This is a reasonable concern, but fortunately self-determination has the resources to at least partially address it. Self-determination calls for communities, societies, and institutions to be co-created by those affected. Thus it is quite probable that ultimately many social institutions and even entire states would need to be radically altered or abolished to reflect on-the-ground communities which may cross traditionally conceived borders. New international institutions may also need to be formed to accommodate these growing self-determined communities and the relations within and between them.<sup>40</sup> In our current nonideal world, lacking in such well developed alternative institutions, food justice activists face deep problems and inequities in food systems and few resources for the most oppressed to address these issues. Thus, practically, any moves by social institutions, even unjust ones, to increase capacities should be welcome, because these capacities can be used to further improve those institutions, *as well as* to build alternatives. For example, La Via Campesina itself supports policy changes to encourage land reform and to fight violence against women. It also (critically) supports enshrining food sovereignty into states' constitutions. It supports these and a host of other reformist goals while also advocating for building alternatives to social institutions.<sup>41</sup> What this concern is pointing to in part is a worry about creating dependence on ultimately unreformable institutions. So as we look at food policies which support or erode epistemic self-determination in the next section, we must be wary of policies which incentivize epistemic dependence (as opposed to interdependence) and subordination to external experts.

## 2. Epistemic Self-Determination

By *epistemic self-determination*, I refer to the ability of community members to jointly determine and engage in the epistemic practices of their community, which can include methodologies for knowledge production and evaluative assumptions.<sup>42</sup> This concept of epistemic self-determination, like self-determination more generally, requires a goal of participatory justice in making this determination and engaging in epistemic projects. Democratic epistemic self-determination is desirable as an instantiation of general self-determination. Further, it is particularly important because without it other forms of self-determination for communities or societies are much more difficult to achieve. As Kristin Shrader-Frechette has pointed out, for participation in policy decisions to be meaningful, the process must include meaningful alternatives. For alternatives to be meaningful, they must include alternative evaluative

assumptions and methodologies which can better embed stakeholders' values.<sup>43</sup> To pick a somewhat hypothetical example, when studying links between a particular pollutant in fish and cancer for people eating the fish, scientific experts' evaluative assumptions may prefer type II errors (false negatives) due to their value of "certainty." They may also focus in their methodology on an exposure risk for typical adult males. The exposed community may prefer methodologies looking at community members who eat far more of the fish, such as children and the elderly, because that embeds their values of respecting these groups. They may also prefer type I errors (false positives) in questions of cancer affecting these vulnerable populations, because this embeds a community value of "better safe than sorry."

Because Shrader-Frechette is looking at *minimums* for meaningful participation itself, rather than the goal of individual and community flourishing advocated in a fuller concept of self-determination,<sup>44</sup> she argues that this requirement of meaningful alternative methodologies and evaluative assumptions may require government expertise and funding to generate these epistemic alternatives. Her requirements are a valuable beginning for thinking through epistemic capacities for democratic processes, but a goal of fuller self-determination requires more than just the participation she is concerned with. State-supported articulation of alternative methodologies and assumptions is insufficient for self-determination for several reasons. First, because self-determination is focused on community and individual growth, outsourcing the generation of alternatives robs the stakeholders of opportunities for development. Second, it runs the risk of recognition injustice if the external experts misunderstand the values of the community. Third, it increases epistemic dependence on this expertise, which may be withdrawn at a future time. Fourth, in our nonideal world, it is the case that a participatory process may well require that stakeholders vigorously speak up for their preferred alternatives and defend their rights to participate, to overcome accidental or intentional erosion of the participatory process. In such nonideal circumstances, the dependence on external epistemic expertise becomes a greater liability. Given all this, epistemic self-determination must also include affected stakeholders having the capability to *generate* their own questions and epistemic projects, as well as generate or defend their own methodologies and evaluative assumptions which embed their values. These reasons in favor of epistemic self-determination hold without arguing for any privileged epistemic status for community knowledge. I find it likely that people living in an area often over many generations and interacting with their environment through daily practice would be likely to develop a kind of local expertise.<sup>45</sup> However, when this is not the case, it is still valuable for a community to develop its own methodologies, evaluative assumptions, and knowledge to interact with experts external to the community for the reasons listed above. The community's epistemic tools may ultimately be altered or abandoned in deliberation with those experts.



While self-determination is focused on flourishing for both the individual and the community, it is the case that individuals require a community for developing and using complex epistemic methodologies. The necessary alternatives Shrader-Frechette advocates could be generated by individuals in theory, but in practice it is much more likely that they will be generated by communities. Even highly trained scientists depend on the epistemic community of science to articulate and critique methodologies, and systematically apply these to generate knowledge. This epistemic mutual dependence within a community is presumably at least as necessary for non-scientists. Thus, to achieve individual epistemic self-determination, it is important to promote communities' epistemic capacities.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth mentioning that this insufficiency for epistemic self-determination of state-supported alternatives is closely related to the difference between an epistemic self-determination account and one of epistemic proceduralism arising out of deliberative democracy.<sup>47</sup> Epistemic proceduralism shares commonalities with epistemic self-determination, including a concern for "epistemic fairness,"<sup>48</sup> a suspicion of mere consequentialism of finding the single "correct" answer to social questions as the justification of social-epistemic arrangements<sup>49</sup> (although while also sharing an optimism about the possibility of participatorily just social arrangements to produce effective knowledge systems), a recognition of the value of "epistemic diversity,"<sup>50</sup> and goals of justice within these structures, such as "transparency and reciprocity."<sup>51</sup> Pure epistemic proceduralism focuses attention on the important issue of the role of epistemology in democratic deliberation and participation, as well as the reverse. However, epistemic proceduralism and deliberative democracy more generally tend to work from ideal theory in a way that the discussion of self-determination as a means of resistance for communities in our nonideal world explicitly rejects. Thus, while epistemic proceduralism can point usefully toward a possible model for what just participation in a community's epistemic self-determination might look like, it is less valuable as a model of what marginalized or oppressed communities should strive for in extant societies.

### 3. Food Policy and Self-Determination—"The Bad"

With the above framework in place, it is possible to evaluate particular food policies by whether they promote or undermine self-determination for stakeholders, particularly epistemic self-determination. To that end, a few examples of food policies and their effect on epistemic self-determination can help illuminate the distinctions above and point to what such a more ambitious analysis would look like. This is a separate question from whether or not the policies or institutions are themselves self-determined by affected stakeholders, although unsurprisingly we will see overlap.

First it is useful to look at contemporary food policies which do not adequately promote self-determination, particularly epistemic self-

determination, or even undercut it in various ways. The use of the term “the bad” in this section’s title, as well as “the good” in the next, should be understood as an oversimplification; there is certainly a continuum of support or erosion of self-determination by food policies, and the policies we will discuss fall at various points along it. Further, policies which are quite poor at promoting self-determination may be good at other important policy goals. In such cases a complex evaluation would need to be carried out. This paper is not arguing that promotion of epistemic self-determination in a community trumps any other good; merely that it is a currently under-recognized goal which ought to be included in that calculus.

Perhaps the most obvious example of policies which undercut self-determination is the practice of food “dumping” (as it is characterized by critics), in which wealthy nations with highly subsidized agriculture (particularly the United States) give excess food directly to impoverished countries with food shortages. This policy has been widely criticized for many years<sup>52</sup> on several grounds. “Dumping” often provides food which is undesirable to the recipients and undercuts traditional food culture (e.g., providing wheat to communities with corn-based cultures). It can also drive farmers, unable to compete with free food, off their farms and into industrial labor in geographically distant cities. This fails the test of being self-determined, in that the supposed beneficiaries of the policy were not given the opportunity to co-determine the policy, and had they been given that opportunity, it is highly doubtful they would have approved the policy that is being implemented. This policy also weakens communities’ epistemic self-determination. New and unwelcome food provided for free undermines communities’ culture centered around food production, preparation, consumption, and understanding. It can also lead to a loss of knowledge and epistemic processes based on those food practices if the direct food aid is continued for an extended period. *In extremis*, these policies can lead to the unwilling dissolution of communities entirely, as its members, particularly in the next generation, disperse to find work.

Although less severe, there are also examples of policies undercutting self-determination domestically. One example is bans or regulations enacted by state agencies against urban food production. In the vibrant urban farming movement in Detroit, for example, urban livestock (such as chickens or goats) are illegal due to outdated food policies maintained without meaningful participation by the affected communities in that decision.<sup>53</sup> The city has also made controversial land use changes which further marginalize the self-determined practices of urban farmers.<sup>54</sup> Again, those decisions were made without meaningful input by the affected communities. This has had the effect of cutting off nascent knowledge and epistemic practices around urban farming and urban animal husbandry before they have a chance to grow. Another example is the move from production kitchens to the heat-and-serve model of school lunch preparation.<sup>55</sup> This has had the effect of limiting the skills which employees (mostly women) in this industry could learn and model for students, as well as use outside of the school,

perhaps at home to prepare meals or to pursue further careers in the food industry. It also had the effect of limiting the ability of the school to adapt to changing demographics, budget cuts, and other challenges disproportionately faced by schools in marginalized communities. These policies and others make communities less self-determined by vitiating community attempts to control their food systems. Further, the policies undermine growing community epistemic capacities around food.

A final example of a program with potentially negative consequences to self-determination are certifications like “organic.” Although “organic” labels are desired by many consumers and sought after by many producers, the certification system is not without its problems, and has the potential to undercut epistemic self-determination. The process to determine the requirements to receive the certification are opaque and rarely if ever incorporate the voices of working small-scale farmers. This, combined with a lack of resources to help people learn how to achieve and maintain certification, has the potential to reduce epistemic self-determination. Obtaining the “organic” label as a producer, and using it as a proxy signal as a consumer, can replace other methods for learning about sustainable farming in a community and adapting to changing circumstances such as climate change. Phrases like “better than organic” is growing in currency among small-scale farmers to describe these more self-determined practices and to engage with consumers in farmers’ markets and other venues, but the regulatory weight behind the “organic” label and the markets it can open are still quite powerful.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. Food Policy and Self-Determination—“The Good”

Other food policies have the potential to develop self-determination generally and epistemic self-determination in particular, again regardless of whether the policy itself was justly self-determined. An example of promising policies are those surrounding local food promotion, including farmers’ markets, food hubs, and food co-ops. These local food programs are not without their problems; two important concerns are that the local food movement risks masking other, overriding justice or environmental concerns governing what we should purchase or consume, and that an emphasis on local foods can lead to a form of jingoism.<sup>57</sup> These are important concerns, but food justice and food sovereignty, let alone more general epistemic self-determination, does not require local food production. Food sovereignty activists, as was mentioned above, call for meaningful community control of local food systems, which when combined with networks of solidarity does not require that food be grown locally.

That being said, local food production can be an important tool in building up or preserving community capacities, including epistemic capacities, and self-determination. For example, they have the potential to build connections between neighbors to help create and increase community connections, and can be a piece of the puzzle to give individuals and groups more transparency and

self-determination over their food. As a particular example of local food policies increasing epistemic self-determination, among policymakers there is a growing interest in and support for food hubs, which address the “middle” market between large-scale food distribution of major farms and large-scale buyers on the one hand, and local direct marketing via community-supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers’ markets on the other. Smaller farmers aggregate their products and use the hub to connect with larger purchasers than they would be able to serve on their own. This is surely useful for mid-range producers, but more importantly for our purposes, food hubs have the recognized potential to be “community entities” which “are able to respond to changing consumer demand for innovation, quality, and variety more deftly than any single producer or any conventional retail outlet” because they can work to build epistemic capacities for the hub members. Further, “food hubs may also facilitate the transmission of social values along with the sense of social connection, exchange and trust” within the hub and between the hub and consumers. Food hubs are themselves often self-determined, working as non-profits run by the members of the hub,<sup>58</sup> and they work to provide more avenues of self-determination for individual food producers and consumers as well as larger communities.<sup>59</sup>

Another example of policies potentially developing epistemic and other forms of self-determination are the creation of food policy councils. These councils typically bring together individuals and community representatives from around the community with business interests, government workers, and scientific experts, to develop food policies at (typically) a state or city level. While these groups may be created entirely by un-self-determined fiat, once in place they have the potential to be quite self-determined and to give greatly increased self-determination to stakeholders in their food policies.<sup>60</sup> The creation of these councils can be an example of policymakers working to further self-determination. Likewise, the abolition of these councils, as happened in 2014 to the Michigan Food Policy Council, is an example of policymakers (in this case the administration of the governor of Michigan) greatly eroding self-determination via food policies.<sup>61</sup>

A final example of positive food policies are those which preserve and encourage the development of epistemic self-determination directly through support for traditional knowledges (TK). For many indigenous and other communities, TK is an important part of epistemic self-determination, because it is not only a collection of knowledge, but also methodologies and evaluative assumptions for solving problems and interacting with the environment in ways which are effective and which embed community beliefs and values.<sup>62</sup> Food policies which engage with and promote TK, such as some versions of adaptive management of food resources,<sup>63</sup> have the potential to support the epistemic self-determination of communities, improve the self-determination of larger food systems and policies by including historically marginalized stakeholders, and increase the efficacy of these systems and policies by benefiting from the knowledge and alternative methodologies which are part of TK.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The above examples show that food policies can be evaluated by their effects on the underexamined but important issue of community self-determination, including epistemic self-determination. This evaluation is over and above a more traditional critique of policies themselves as arising out of just participatory processes. Self-determination is part and parcel of participatory justice in a democracy, and so should be pursued when possible. Furthermore, as has been alluded to above, there are consequentialist reasons for food policy-makers to promote self-determination. First, with self-determination, stakeholders are able to evaluate proposed assumptions, methodologies, and policies to see if they reflect their knowledge and values, and to develop and articulate their own projects as alternatives to the choices given to them by those in power. These alternatives are then brought up and advocated for by stakeholders with self-determination in a just participatory process. This has the potential to be a fertile process more likely to hit on effective policies than in a top-down, hierarchical process. Given the problems associated with modern industrial food systems, from environmental harms to seemingly unavoidable systemic failures leading to famines, a more epistemically rich process seems desirable. Second, self-determination has the potential to lead to greater understanding and support of food policies by the stakeholders. Given that many problems endemic to food such as obesity, diabetes, consumer waste, food poisoning through improper preparation, runoff through misapplication of fertilizers and pesticides, and so on, have some component in policy application by stakeholders, an increased understanding and “buy-in” by stakeholders is also desirable. Finally, as self-determination makes communities better able to pursue their own vision of the good and to participate more effectively within the larger society, marginalized or oppressed communities have good reason to pursue it just as state institutions have a *prima facie* obligation to promote it.

Evaluating food policies by how well they promote self-determination is not a common metric, let alone evaluating them in terms of epistemic self-determination. Nevertheless, given the strong value epistemic self-determination has, and the power of food policies to promote or erode it, this is an evaluation which ought to be more widely pursued in food policy conversations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>FSIS.USDA.gov

<sup>2</sup>ERS.USDA.gov

<sup>3</sup>RIC.NAL.USDA.gov

<sup>4</sup>EPA.gov/agriculture/tlan.html

<sup>5</sup>DOL.gov/whd/mspa/

<sup>6</sup>OSHA.gov/SLTC/meatpacking/

<sup>7</sup>Michael Moss, “While Warning About Fat, U.S. Pushes Cheese Sales,” *New York Times* (November 26, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>AMS.USDA.gov

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., Ron Reed and Kari Norgaard, "Salmon Feeds Our People: Challenging Dams on the Klamath River," in *Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: From Rights to Resource Management*, ed. Kristen Walker Painemilla and Anthony Rylands (Arlington, VA: Conservation International).

<sup>10</sup>Raj Patel, "What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like?" *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 663–706.

<sup>11</sup>See, e.g., John Robinson, "Squaring the Circle? Some Thoughts on the Idea of Sustainable Development," *Ecological Economics* 48 (2004): 369–84; Susan Leigh Star and John Geisemer, "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals on Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology," *Social Studies of Science* 19 (1989): 387–420; Pascale Trompette and Dominique Vinck, "Revisiting the Notion of Boundary Object," *Revue d'Anthropologie des connaissances* 3 (2009): 3–25.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., Nyéléni 2007 (<http://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>); Hannah Kay Wittman, Annette Aurelie Desmarais, and Nettie Wiebe (eds.), *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature, and Community* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2010).

<sup>14</sup>See, e.g., Peter Evans, "Collective Capabilities, Culture, and Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37, no. 2 (2002): 54–60; David Schlosberg and David Caruthers, "Indigenous Struggles, Environmental Justice, and Community Capabilities," *Global Environmental Politics* 10, no. 4 (2010): 12–35; Meredith Minkler, Victoria Breckwich Vásquez, Mansoureh Tajik, and Dana Petersen, "Promoting Environmental Justice Through Community-Based Participatory Research: The Role of Community and Partnership Capacity," *Health Education and Behavior* 35, no. 1 (2008): 119–37.

<sup>15</sup>Thus, this concept of self-determination is not relying on what is usually considered to be a traditional communitarian account, but rather (as we will see further in later sections of this paper) one that takes seriously the value of communities both because they are valued by individual members, as well as for their instrumental value for achieving participatory justice for the individual members. This paper, and the concepts within food sovereignty discourse on which it draws, do not assume that communities must be fixed over time, nor that people can belong to only one community. Indeed this latter is not only unnecessary but unlikely.

<sup>16</sup>Ian Carter, *A Measure of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248.

<sup>17</sup>Solava S. Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities: The Capability Approach as a Conceptual Framework for Self-Help," *Journal of Human Development* 7, no. 3 (2006): 397–416.

<sup>18</sup>Evans, "Collective Capabilities."

<sup>19</sup>Examples of people valuing their community and seeing their communities as the victims of some harms and injustices abound, particularly within the literature on food sovereignty. As a beginning, see Nyeleni.org.

<sup>20</sup>Ian Werkheiser, "Community Epistemic Capacity," *Social Epistemology* (2015). doi:10.1080/02691728.2014.971911

<sup>21</sup>See, e.g., Michael Pimbert, *Towards Food Sovereignty* (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 2009); William Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010); Whittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe, *Food Sovereignty*.

<sup>22</sup>Nancy Fraser, "Abnormal Justice," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 3 (2008): 393–422; Sofia Näsström, "The Challenge of the All-Affected Principle," *Political Studies* 59 (2011): 116–34.

<sup>23</sup>Johan Karlsson Schaffer, "Affected and Subjected: The All-Affected Principle in Transnational Democratic Theory." Discussion Paper, Social Science Research Center, Berlin (December 5, 2006). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2274644> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2274644>

<sup>24</sup>Nyéleni Declaration, 2007; "October 16th, World Day of Action for Food Sovereignty and Against Transnational Corporations" ([viacampesina.org](http://viacampesina.org)), accessed March 3, 2015.

- <sup>25</sup> Carol C. Gould, *Interactive Democracy: The Social Roots of Global Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 87–89.
- <sup>26</sup> Carol C. Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gould, *Interactive Democracy*.
- <sup>27</sup> Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 74.
- <sup>28</sup> www.ohchr.org
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>
- <sup>30</sup> <http://www.fas.usda.gov/newsroom/farm-bill-stakeholder-listening-session>
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>
- <sup>32</sup> See, e.g., National Research Council, *Building Consensus through Risk Management of the Department of Energy's Environmental Remediation Program* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1994); National Research Council, Elinor Ostrom, Tom Dietz, Nives Dolsak, Paul C. Stern, Susan Stonich, and Elke Weber (eds.), *The Drama of the Commons* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2002); National Research Council, Paul C. Stern and Harvey V. Fineberg (eds.), *Understanding Risk: Informing Decisions in a Democratic Society* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1996); National Research Council, Tom Dietz, and Paul C. Stern (eds.), *Public Participation in Environmental Assessment and Decision Making* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2008).
- <sup>33</sup> National Research Council et al., *Understanding Risk*, 76.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* For a more in-depth discussion of the ramifications of this policy, see Werkheiser, “Community Epistemic Capacity.”
- <sup>36</sup> Nyéléni Declaration.
- <sup>37</sup> Michael Menser, “Transnational Participatory Democracy in Action: The Case of La Via Campesina,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39, 1 (2008): 20–41, at 24.
- <sup>38</sup> Nyéléni Declaration.
- <sup>39</sup> Menser, “Transitional Participatory Democracy,” 31.
- <sup>40</sup> For an interesting exploration of what this might look like, see Gould, *Interactive Democracy*.
- <sup>41</sup> [viacampesina.org](http://viacampesina.org)
- <sup>42</sup> Werkheiser, “Community Epistemic Capacity.”
- <sup>43</sup> Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Risk and Rationality: Philosophical Foundations for Populist Reforms* (Berkeley: California University Press 1991), 207.
- <sup>44</sup> Gould, *Globalizing Democracy*, p. 48.
- <sup>45</sup> For an example of local expertise, see Phil Brown, “When the Public Knows Better: Popular Epidemiology Challenges the System,” *Environment* 35, 8 (1993): 16–22.
- <sup>46</sup> Werkheiser, “Community Epistemic Capacity.”
- <sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Fabienne Peter, “Pure Epistemic Proceduralism,” *Episteme* 5, 1 (2008): 33–55; Helen Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- <sup>48</sup> Longino. *Fate of Knowledge*.
- <sup>49</sup> As is found in approaches to democratic theory as diverse as the following: David Estlund, “Making Truth Safe for Democracy,” in D. Copp, J. Hampton, and J. E. Roemer (eds.), *The Idea of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 71–100; Christian List and Robert Goodin, “Epistemic Democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet Jury Theorem,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (2001): 277–306.
- <sup>50</sup> Peter, “Pure Epistemic Proceduralism,” 34.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Christopher Barrett and Dan Maxwell, *Food Aid After Fifty Years: Recasting Its Role* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Pimbert, *Towards Food Sovereignty*; Vernon Ruttan, *Why Food Aid?* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Schanbacher, *Politics of Food*; Theodore Schulz, “Value of US Farm Surpluses to Underdeveloped Countries,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 43, no. 5 (1960): 1019–1030; Paul B. Thompson, “Food Aid and the Famine Relief Argument (Brief Return),” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 209–227.

- <sup>53</sup>Rick Pluta, “State Agriculture Commission Approves Backyard Livestock Rule,” Michigan Radio April 28, 2014 (michiganradio.org).
- <sup>54</sup>John Gallagher, “Critics Say Hantz Getting Unfair Advantage as Detroit Council Prepares to Revisit Plan for Land Sale,” *Detroit Free Press* (2012) (freep.com).
- <sup>55</sup>Jennifer E. Gaddis, “Fit to Feed: Labor, Ecology, and the Remaking of the National School Lunch Program.” Dissertation, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (2014). Available from ProQuest.com
- <sup>56</sup>See, e.g., Christy Getz and Aimee Shreck, “What Organic and Fair Trade Labels Do Not Tell Us: Towards a Place-Based Understanding of Certification,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 30, no. 5 (2006): 490–501; David Goodman and Michael Goodman, “Localism, Livelihoods and the ‘Post-Organic’: Changing Perspectives on Alternative Food Networks in the United States,” in *Alternative Food Geographies: Representation and Practices*, ed. Damian Maye, Lewis Holloway, and Moya Kneafsey, pp. 23–38. Oxford: Elsevier, 2007); Jeffrey R. Follett, “Choosing a Food Future: Differentiating Among Alternative Food Options,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2009): 31–51.
- <sup>57</sup>See, e.g., Laura B. DeLind, “Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagons to the Wrong Stars?” *Agriculture and Human Values* 28 (2011): 273–83; Ian Werkheiser and Samantha Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo: Three Sub-Movements Within Local Food,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2014): 201–10; Mark Navin, “Local Food and Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 3: 349–68.
- <sup>58</sup>James Matson, Martha Sullins, and Chris Cook, “The Role of Food Hubs in Local Food Marketing,” *USDA Rural Development Service Report 73* (2013): 11.
- <sup>59</sup>For more in-depth work on food hubs in a particular geographical context, see the special issue of *Local Environment* 18, no. 5, *Sustainable Local Food Spaces: Constructing Communities of Food*, which explores food hubs in Ottawa.
- <sup>60</sup>Rebecca Schiff, “The Role of Food Policy Councils in Developing Sustainable Food Systems,” *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* 3, no. 2–3 (2008): 206–28.
- <sup>61</sup>See *ICC Food Policy Subcommittee* (2014), Michigan.gov/MDARD; Michael Jackman, “A Belated Eulogy for Michigan’s Food Policy Council,” *Detroit Metro Times* (December 21, 2014), metrotimes.com
- <sup>62</sup>See, e.g., Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke, “Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management,” *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (2000): 1251–62; Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (New York: Routledge 2008); Paul Nadasdy, “The Politics of TEK: Power and the ‘Integration’ of Knowledge,” *Arctic Anthropology* 36 (1999): 1–18.
- <sup>63</sup>Berkes et al., “Rediscovery.”
- <sup>64</sup>One note of caution here—institutions and policymakers must be very careful when engaging with TK to do so in ways which do not exploit the communities possessing TK nor undercut those communities’ epistemic self-determination. A guideline for how to successfully interact with TK is: Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup (CTKW), “Guidelines for Considering Traditional Knowledges in Climate Change Initiatives” (<https://climatetkw.wordpress.com>), which advocates primarily for two principles—“Cause No Harm” and “Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.”