

Cultivating citizenship, equity, and social inclusion? Putting civic agriculture into practice through urban farming

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Abstract Civic agriculture is an approach to agriculture and food production that—in contrast with the industrial food system—is embedded in local environmental, social, and economic contexts. Alongside proliferation of the alternative food projects that characterize civic agriculture, growing literature critiques how their implementation runs counter to the ideal of civic agriculture. This study assesses the relevance of three such critiques to urban farming, aiming to understand how different farming models balance civic and economic exchange, prioritize food justice, and create socially inclusive spaces. Using a case study approach that incorporated interviews, participant observation, and document review, I compare two urban farms in Baltimore, Maryland—a “community farm” that emphasizes community engagement, and a “commercial farm” that focuses on job creation. Findings reveal the community farm prioritizes civic participation and food access for low-income residents, and strives to create socially inclusive space. However, the farmers’ “outsider” status challenges community engagement efforts. The commercial farm focuses on financial sustainability rather than participatory processes or food equity, reflecting the use of food production as a means toward community development rather than propagation of a food citizenry. Both farms meet authentic needs that contribute to neighborhood improvement, though findings suggest a lack of interest by residents in obtaining urban farm food, raising

concerns about its appeal and accessibility to diverse consumers. Though not equally participatory, equitable, or social inclusive, both farms exemplify projects physically and philosophically rooted in the local social context, necessary characteristics for promoting civic engagement with the food system.

Keywords Urban agriculture · Alternative food · Food citizenship · Food equity

Abbreviations

AFI Alternative agrifood institution
CBO Community based organization
CSA Community supported agriculture
UFC Urban farming company

Introduction

The U.S. agriculture and food system has bifurcated along distinct lines (Grey 2000; Lyson and Guptill 2004). The industrial food system, comprised of large-scale, capital-intensive operations, aims to maximize production efficiency through centralized, corporate management of food production (Lyson 2004). Beyond cheap and abundant food, this system has yielded environmental degradation, poor nutrition, food-safety concerns, a loss of family farms, and the distancing of people from food practices and knowledge (Allen 2010).

In contrast, civic agriculture encapsulates a locally-based approach to agriculture and food production that prioritizes place—environmentally, socially, and economically (Lyson 2005). Characterized by place-based

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networks of small-scale, community-oriented farms and food producers that depend on local resources and serve local consumers, civic agriculture not only meets a demand for local, high-quality products, but also nurtures the social and economic development of communities (Lyson 2004). Civic agriculture manifests through direct-marketing schemes such as farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA), and alternative production modes like community gardens and small-scale organic farms (Lyson and Guptill 2004). Frequently referred to as "alternative agrifood institutions" (AFIs) in the literature, these activities provide income for farmers and producers while making local food available to consumers, educating people of the value of sustainably-grown food, and helping build a sense of community by connecting civic farmers and food citizens (DeLind and Bingen 2008; Guthman 2011; Lyson 2005).

As AFIs have taken root, a growing body of literature has scrutinized their implementation, with particular focus on how reliance on entrepreneurial modalities and market-based strategies has led AFIs astray from the original vision of civic agriculture (Mares and Alkon 2011). Such critical examination affords one method of assessing whether these institutions continue to embody the commitment to community problem-solving—as opposed to individual competition—that defines civic agriculture, and where course corrections may be necessary. To date, farmers markets and CSA programs have resided at the center of this inquiry. In this paper I build upon this scholarship by examining urban farming—a type of urban agriculture that emphasizes income-generating food production—as a mode of civic agriculture. In many ways, urban farming presents a quintessential example of civic agriculture. Bound by a city's limits, food production is innately intertwined in the local environmental, social, and economic context, and due to its urban location, it frequently creates space where farmers and food citizens mingle. Yet scholars have begun to highlight race- and class-based disparities in urban agriculture (Hoover 2013; Reynolds 2015), and deeper examination may reveal that other critiques of AFIs also apply to urban farming.

I begin by discussing three fundamental critiques of AFIs. The first draws attention to the overshadowing of the civic aspect of civic agriculture by a focus on private enterprise, the second raises concerns about unequal access to AFIs by minorities and the poor, and the third highlights the role white privilege plays in the exclusion of minorities from participation in AFIs. Using these critiques as a guiding framework, this study aims to understand how different urban farming models balance civic and economic exchange, prioritize food justice, and create socially inclusive spaces. Employing a case study approach, I

compare two urban farms located in Baltimore, Maryland to answer the following questions: To what degree do urban farms prioritize civic exchange in addition to economic goals? How do urban farms create a venue for public work and civic engagement? What capacity do urban farms have to ensure that "good" food reaches racially and socio-economically diverse people? In what ways do urban farms create inclusive spaces? In short, I seek to understand how urban farms meet (or fail to meet) the ideal of civic agriculture as a form of locally based agriculture linked to a community's social development.

Urban farming in Baltimore

In Baltimore, Maryland, the site of this study, the municipal government has encouraged expansion of urban farming by implementing an initiative to lease vacant city-owned land to experienced farmers, changing the city's zoning code to allow for greater agricultural activity, and adopting an urban agriculture policy plan (Baltimore Office of Sustainability 2013). Baltimore currently houses 18 urban farms (Maryland Food System Map Project 2016), which differ from community gardens in their focus on producing food to sell. As members of the Farm Alliance of Baltimore, a commitment to socially, economically, and environmentally just practices unites many of these projects (Farm Alliance of Baltimore City 2012).

Urban farming represents one way of putting the vision of civic agriculture into practice. Lyson (2004) describes six characteristics of civic agriculture: (1) an orientation toward serving local—as opposed to mass—markets and consumers; (2) a view of agriculture as an integral part of the community, and not merely as a means of producing commodities; (3) concern with the quality of products over yield and efficiency; (4) labor- and land-intensiveness, with a smaller scope and scale than industrial agriculture; (5) reliance on site-specific knowledge rather than standardized practices; and (6) direct market links to consumers. These characteristics generally apply to Baltimore's urban farms. The Farm Alliance articulates the benefits of urban farming as supporting Baltimore's neighborhoods through local production of healthy food, creating green community spaces, and bolstering the local economy (Farm Alliance of Baltimore City 2012). Members of the Farm Alliance avoid synthetic inputs in order to produce fresh, natural, and healthy food; the farms range in size from $\frac{1}{4}$ acre to a few acres and rely upon the labor of a few farmers and volunteers; a unique organization or group of farmers manages each farm, tailoring it to the unique physical and social characteristics of the site; and the farmers primarily sell their produce through neighborhood farm stands, farmers' markets, and local restaurants.

Critiques of alternative agrifood institutions

Alongside the growing food movement and the proliferation of AFIs, scholarship has emerged that critically reflects upon the practices of these institutions and the ways in which their implementation runs counter to the original vision of civic agriculture. In this section, I discuss three critiques from this literature relating to (1) a disconcerting focus on neoliberal, market-based strategies; (2) the inaccessibility of AFIs to the poor and people of color; and (3) the racial privilege that pervades these institutions.

Critique 1: a focus on economic, rather than civic, exchange

The civic agriculture approach shifts the balance between civic and economic exchange, reorienting agriculture and food production away from economic efficiency and toward the needs of local growers, consumers, economies, and communities. The cooperative social relationships that form between producers and consumers buffers “the imperative to earn a profit” (Lyson 2005). Community problem-solving forms the foundation of civic agriculture, with direct citizen participation acting to shape the food system (Chung et al. 2005). In contrast, the concentration and centralization of the industrial food system discourages public participation in decision-making (Travline and Hunold 2010).

In light of this conceptualization, DeLind (2002) describes a troubling trend whereby civic agriculture has become overly focused on entrepreneurship and market-building, rather than promoting citizenship. Within this paradigm, AFIs such as farmers’ markets revolve around private enterprise and gauge their success by economic expansion, and “the principal players (however friendly and personalized) are still producers and consumers; their basic identities are still framed by the economic or commercial transaction” (DeLind 2002). DeLind’s concern resides not in the fact that civic agriculture creates opportunities for commerce, but rather in the overshadowing of civic activities by fiscal interests.

DeLind (2002) argues that refocusing on the civic nature of civic agriculture requires the development of collective activities that prioritize public interests (DeLind 2011). Specifically, she describes public work as an essential element of the development of civic agriculture. At the center of citizenship, public work embodies the individual sacrifice and relinquishing of self-interests to a common good that creates the sense of community necessary for civic engagement (DeLind 2002). Importantly, public work occurs in public spaces, which Chung and colleagues (2005) define not as a particular place, but rather as a forum that brings diverse people together to problem solve, each

contributing a unique set of knowledge, values, and interests. Through their research, Chung et al. demonstrate that AFIs can create public space if the work contributes to a common good, if participants engage as citizens rather than consumers through collective problem-solving, and if projects welcome interaction with non-participants.

Critique 2: inequity in the accessibility of alternative food

Scholars have also raised concerns regarding equity of access to local food and the ways in which AFIs exclude the poor and people of color. In the U.S., these groups face greater food insecurity and have lower access to healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2013, rates of food insecurity were highest for low-income households (34.8 %), as well as higher for blacks (26.1 %) and Hispanics (23.7 %) than for white non-Hispanics (10.6 %) (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2014). Furthermore, research shows that black and lower-income neighborhoods have lower availability of healthy foods than white and higher-income neighborhoods (Franco et al. 2008).

Addressing these racial and economic inequities requires the cultivation of food justice. Without an explicit focus on justice, some scholars worry that AFIs may simply serve to placate the privileged, leading to a two-tiered food system in which the non-privileged must cope with the problems created by the industrial food system (Allen 2008; Guthman 2008a). Such segregation in the food system fails to meet the commitment embodied by civic agriculture to develop a socially sustainable agriculture and food production system that serves local consumers (Lyson 2004). Although AFIs frequently aim to serve low-income communities, the economic framework in which these institutions reside inherently constrains their ability to address food inequity (Alkon and Mares 2012; Allen 2010). AFIs achieve the greatest success when they prioritize issues and products valued by affluent communities (Alkon and Mares 2012). As DeLind and Bingen (2008) point out, “the market, of itself, does not encourage social equity or democratic participation, but best serves those who are both able and willing to profit and to consume.” Despite intentions to advance food justice, these alternatives remain more accessible to the privileged (Allen 2008), signaling a failure in meeting the commitment to social development that defines civic agriculture.

Though limited, research indicates a lack of participation by low-income populations in AFIs. For example, research by Guthman and colleagues (2006) highlighted the low participation of low-income consumers in California farmers’ markets and CSA programs, despite the effort managers put into improving the affordability of food sold at these venues. Many managers participating in the research believed the affordability of the produce to be

a determining factor in participation, and farmers' market managers pointed to the demographics of surrounding communities as shaping the makeup of market customers. With an aim of providing farmers with a regular source of income, farmers' markets generally arise in higher income communities, sites where demand already exists (Guthman 2011) but where poor people have little opportunity to participate. Evidence also shows that in comparison with commodity agriculture, direct agricultural markets are more prevalent in counties with higher median incomes (Lyson and Guptill 2004). Furthermore, a survey of urban farmers revealed that farms with a market orientation were less likely to locate in lower-income neighborhoods as compared to farms with social goals targeting economically disadvantaged populations, further highlighting the importance of a food justice orientation (Dimitri et al. 2016). Incorporating strategies to improve affordability (e.g., through government entitlement programs) does little to diversify participation if AFIs remain geographically segregated.

Critique 3: social exclusion within alternative agrifood institutions

The dominance of white culture in the discourse and practices of AFIs has the potential to further exclude people of color from participation. Spaces become coded as "white" and thereby omit others both through the physical clustering of white bodies (Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Slocum 2007) and through "whitened cultural practices," which constitute "a set of ways of being in the world, a set of cultural practices often not named as 'white' by white folks, but looked upon instead as 'American' or 'normal'" (Frankenberg 1993). These whitened cultural practices act to produce environments that conform to ideals not directly associated with race, but rather with normalcy (Kobayashi and Peake 2000). The coding of AFIs as white and the exclusion of people of color constrains the ability of these institutions to meaningfully address inequality in the food system (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2011) and to promote citizen participation, which is the cornerstone of civic agriculture (Lyson 2004).

Several scholars have written about racial coding of AFIs as white (Alkon and Mares 2012; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a, b). For example, Alkon and McCullen (2011) discuss how, through an intersection of whiteness and wealth, some farmers' markets have become sites of race and class privilege, potentially deterring participation of low-income people and people of color. In a case study of one California farmers' market, the authors describe how high food prices, an emphasis on gourmet food, the romanticizing of European food culture, and an insider ambiance reinforce

the whiteness of the market. They conclude that despite an emphasis on community building, the way such markets define community inadvertently attracts whites while dismissing people of color. Such research demonstrates how a lack of open discourse about the absence of people of color from AFIs acts to disregard minority participation, yet even projects that take race into account can be coded as white. Research by Guthman (2008a) reveals that many food and agriculture social justice organizations working in communities of color appear to lack resonance with community members, largely because the projects reflect whitened cultural practices and values. Based on her observations of the disconnect between white-led outreach programs seeking to increase food access and the communities of color they are reaching out to, Bernard-Carreño (2015) argues for "valid inclusion" of people of color into positions of leadership in the food movement.

Scholars have also begun to draw attention to social exclusion in urban agriculture, including community gardens and urban farms. Citing research from Philadelphia and Denver, Hoover (2013) explains that although urban agriculture primarily occurs in African American and Latino neighborhoods, whites often lead the projects with little local community participation. He argues that without representation by members of the community in which urban agriculture projects reside, these projects unintentionally create an environment that excludes people of color, once again leaving whites in control of the land and its yields (Hoover 2013). Based on research in New York City, Reynolds (2015) contends that the media has reinforced white dominance by representing whites as the face of urban agriculture, despite the predominance of African American and Latino/a growers. Her research highlights race-based disparities in the resources different urban agriculture organizations can leverage, exacerbating white privilege within the urban agriculture system. White (2011) documents a similar phenomenon in Detroit, where whites moving into the predominantly black city appear to garner greater control of land for urban agriculture than blacks. These racial inequities in urban agriculture contradict the commitment to place and reliance on local resources that embodies a civic agriculture approach.

I now turn to the case study of two of Baltimore's urban farms, using the critiques described above as a framework for examining the degree to which disparate urban farming projects meet the original conceptualization of civic agriculture as participatory, equitable, and inclusive—characteristics of an agricultural and food production system that focuses not only on local environmental and economic considerations, but also on the civic bonds necessary to support it.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design and was part of a larger research project regarding community perceptions of urban farming in residential areas of Baltimore, Maryland. The case study methodology involves studying an issue through multiple bounded systems (in this instance, urban farms) using several sources of information, a process of triangulation that allows for an in-depth understanding of a case (Creswell 2007). The two farms included as cases for this study—the first referred to as the “urban community farm” and the second as the “urban commercial farm”—were selected from a larger pool of urban farm cases because they contrast each other in several key ways, including the identity and motivations of their founders, their business models, and the degree to which they engage community members. The urban community farm was founded by two neighborhood “outsiders” who wanted to grow food to share with local residents; they sell farm produce at a farmers’ market and (at a discounted price) directly to residents and place great emphasis on community engagement and creating a neighborhood gathering space. The urban commercial farm was founded by a local community based organization that aims to create jobs for vulnerable residents, an intermediary urban farming company sells the farm produce to Baltimore restaurants, and the founders do not prioritize community engagement with the farm. The juxtaposition created by comparing these farms facilitated an examination of the questions raised by the critiques of AFIs within diverse models of urban farming.

Data collection procedures

Two research assistants (Master’s students studying nutrition) and I collected data from October 2012 to October 2013. Prior to data collection, I trained the research assistants on techniques for conducting interviews and participant observation. To gain an in-depth understanding of the context surrounding each farm case, multiple data collection methods were employed, including in-depth interviews with multiple participant types, direct observation, and document review. We conducted in-depth interviews with founders of each farm ($n = 6$), and with leaders of community associations ($n = 3$) and adult residents ($n = 12$) from the surrounding neighborhoods. Urban farm founders and neighborhood leaders were purposively selected for participation. Residents were selected through snowball sampling, with farmers and neighborhood leaders providing initial contacts. Interviews were semi-structured following prompts from an open-ended discussion guide.

Interviews lasted approximately 1 h and took place at a location of the participants’ choosing. Interviewees received US \$20 for participating. Participants provided verbal informed consent prior to participating in the study. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We conducted unstructured participant observations at each farm (totaling 16 h). Observations included volunteering at the farms and attending community events held at the farms. Observations focused on the people present, interactions between individuals, and attitudes expressed about the urban farm and its relationship to the neighborhood. We wrote detailed notes immediately following each observation. To triangulate interview and observation data, we also collected documents related to each farm (e.g., flyers, list-serve emails, and notes from community meetings).

Data analysis and data quality

To analyze each urban farm’s relationship with the surrounding community, I began by coding interview transcripts, participant observation notes, and relevant documents using a deductive coding scheme. Codes consisted of themes related to farm operations and farmers’ interactions with the surrounding community. Coding was done using the qualitative analysis software HyperResearch 3.5.1. (ResearchWare Inc. 2012). I compiled coded data into a summary report for each farm that included a description of the neighborhood and farm, the farm’s history, the motivations of the farm’s founders, the farm’s operational model, residents’ perceptions of the farm, and community engagement efforts. Drawing upon prior literature, I then delineated a set of queries for each of the three critiques of AFIs described above (see Table 1). I used these questions as a conceptual framework to analyze the data, seeking evidence from the summary reports to respond to each query and ultimately assessing the relevance of each critique to the two urban farming cases.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this research, I applied the quality criteria of credibility and transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of data (i.e., using multiple methods of data collection and drawing upon multiple interviewee types), leading to a rich understanding of each farm’s operations and relationships with the community. Additionally, conducting interviews among different interviewee types over the course of a year strengthened my confidence in having obtained adequate data saturation. As to the transferability of this research, the thick description of each case provides context for determining its relevance to other settings.

Table 1 Queries made of each urban farm case during data analysis

Critique	Data queries
Civic agriculture has become focused on economic interests and private enterprise, placing the civic aspect of the concept as a secondary concern	<p>Were farmers motivated to start a farm in order to fulfill personal goals or to work toward the common good?</p> <p>Is there a common interest between the farmers and local residents (i.e., do local community members view the farm as addressing neighborhood challenges)?</p> <p>To what degree does the farm's business model emphasize economic exchange/profitability?</p> <p>What aspects of public work are visible (i.e., work done by a diverse group of individuals acting together for the public good)?</p> <p>Is non-farmer input welcomed and integrated?</p> <p>In terms of their involvement with the farm, are residents treated as consumers or citizens?</p>
By operating within a market framework, AFIs cannot address the lack of access to fresh foods by poor people and people of color	<p>Do the farmers prioritize food justice?</p> <p>How is farm food distributed? Is it accessible and affordable to disadvantaged residents?</p> <p>Is the type of produce grown selected for its appeal to residents or to high-end markets?</p> <p>Do local residents participate by purchasing farm food?</p>
White privilege and the coding of AFIs as white spaces excludes people of color from participation	<p>What efforts are made to make the farm a socially inclusive space?</p> <p>Are farmers a different race/ethnicity than the majority of residents where the farm is located? If so, do residents consider the farmers "outsiders"?</p> <p>Are local residents interested in participating in this "alternative" to conventional foods?</p> <p>What efforts do farmers make to engage local residents with the farm?</p> <p>How was the decision made to start a farm in the neighborhood, and who had a voice in this decision?</p>

Results

Both the urban community farm and urban commercial farm were established on lots that had been vacant for decades and had become dumping grounds for trash. The neighborhoods surrounding each farm have higher poverty and unemployment rates than Baltimore as a whole (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance 2014) and rank "below average" on adult level of education, the community built environment (measured by liquor store and tobacco retail density), community social environment (i.e. violence and arrest rates), and vacant building density (Ames et al. 2011). Furthermore, the areas surrounding both farms are designated food deserts¹ (Baltimore City Department of Planning 2012).

¹ Defined as an area where the distance to a supermarket is > ¼ mile, the median household income is at or below 185 % of the Federal Poverty Level, over 40 % of households have no vehicle available, and the average Healthy Food Availability Index score for supermarkets, convenience, and corner stores is low.

The following descriptions of the two urban farming cases focus on details related to the queries outlined in Table 1.

Case 1: urban community farm

Tucked away on a quarter-acre lot on the side streets of a centrally located neighborhood, this diversified vegetable farm includes a hoop house, outdoor crop rows, and a small orchard; adjacent lays the farm's community garden. At the time of the study the farm had been in operation for 2 years, during which time the farmers held full-time jobs and managed the farm in their spare time. Before founding the farm, the (white) urban farmers did not live in the (predominantly black) neighborhood; they located the farm there because it had a "solid neighborhood feel" with a lot of "porch culture."

The farmers' motivations to start an urban farm stem from both personal interest in growing food on a larger scale than gardening allows and a moral sense of food equity. The farmers described the farm as "a project to see," which is to say, an experiment in growing food for

the community within the space constraints of the urban environment. Concomitantly, one farmer recounted that it felt “unfair coming into a neighborhood where there was a lot of vacant land, growing food on it, and not sharing it with the community.” The farmers endeavored to create a project that could serve the community without simply acting as a charity. In initial discussions with community association leaders, one farmer wrote:

As lovely as [giving food away] is, I feel like it is not a sustainable model and ... free giveaways create a strange power dynamic. And at the same time coming and using a community’s land to grow food also feels a bit exploitative if some of that food is not getting back into the community. I feel like we are walking this fine line between charity and exploitation and neither feels good.

To solicit community input and gauge support for having a farm in the neighborhood, the farmers spoke with residents living on the block surrounding the vacant lot and attended community association meetings prior to breaking ground. Over time, a business model evolved whereby they sell farm produce at a weekly on-site farm stand, through a neighborhood CSA, and at a shared produce stand at a farmers’ market in a nearby neighborhood. To keep the produce affordable for low-income residents, they accept federal food aid benefits. The farmers also freely share farm food at community association meetings, community events held at the farm, and with curious passersby. Additionally, they created an on-site community garden to provide space for community members to grow their own food. Through this community-oriented model, the farmers do not aim to make a profit from the farm, nor is the farm economically sustainable. To maintain the farm, the farmers rely on grant support, their own labor, and the assistance of volunteers.

According to resident interviewees, the neighborhood’s reception to the idea for the farm was mostly positive, though some expressed initial doubt about how the neighborhood would benefit from the farm. One resident said it was seen as a “hobby for spoiled kids.” Over time acceptance increased, largely due to the dedication the farmers demonstrated to the farm and neighborhood.

In honesty... first I thought the majority of the people that were up there were white people. And I thought it was gonna benefit them. And then, [the farmers] came out in the community strong. And my whole thought just turned around. ... they got involved with the community association, they would bring stuff to the meetings, they knocked on every door darn near around here. And they gave samples out. ... It wasn’t, “Cause we white, we gonna do this and... take it over

here...” They gave back right to the community. – Resident

Resident interviewees praised the farmers for their hard work, and for working for no pay. The farmers further demonstrate commitment to the neighborhood through their willingness to address residents’ concerns about the farm and their active participation with the community association.

[The farmers have] made it clear that this is not just a farm that is used to produce food to put money in [their] pockets, this is a community thing. ... The money that [they] have gotten from the farm, they turn around and spend it back on the farm, and things for the neighborhood. – Neighborhood leader

In terms of benefits to the neighborhood, the farm appears to have ameliorated the neighborhood’s trash problem—an issue raised by all resident interviewees—by cleaning up a formerly trash-filled lot. The farmers also helped drive efforts to clean up the wider neighborhood; for example, they sold trashcans and recycling bins for a discounted price during a community event held at the farm. Other benefits described by residents include the creation of community space that brings the neighborhood together and positive activities for youth, including opportunities to learn about the provenance of food. Some residents described the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables as an additional benefit, though this did not appear to be the farm’s most salient contribution to the neighborhood.

Despite efforts to make farm produce available and affordable, the farmers reported few people came to the farm stand, and an attempt to sell the produce at a local corner store failed when no one purchased the food. One neighborhood leader believed the disinterest in the farm food stems from reluctance by residents to eat food grown in a previously trash-filled space:

[T]here was a lot of concern in the neighborhood. A farm there? [Residents] really didn’t think it was a good idea. ... ‘cause that area was so filthy. There was so much trash. So much rats. ... it was like a dumping ground. It was really bad, I mean not some place you wanna eat from.

The food was, in fact, safe to eat—the farmers had the soil tested for contamination prior to establishing the farm. But distrust of the food reportedly lingered, apparently reflecting a visceral reaction stemming from residents’ association of the space with a junkyard.

The farmers engaged the community in numerous ways, including hosting community events and free gardening workshops, running an after-school gardening club for

youth, and offering volunteer opportunities. After resolving some aesthetic issues, the farmers created a neatly maintained space that incorporates pieces of artwork, decorative plants, and benches—all efforts to create a welcoming environment. Observations at the farm revealed substantial informal interaction that occurs between the farmers and local residents. A steady stream of foot traffic flows past the farm and residents frequently greet the farmers. The farmers intentionally take time to talk to passersby in an effort to build bonds with community members:

I think having a regular presence... you see the regular people, you wave, you say “hello,” you walk over, you say “OH, you know, we’re growing this right now.” ... [A]nd they feel welcomed to come in. I think engaging with people, and showing them around makes them feel like they are able to come in and get used to the project. – Urban farmer

Community events held at the farm—such as seasonal festivals—were viewed as particularly important in creating a connection between residents and the farm.

[O]ur block party in October was amazing. ... There was so many people there from the neighborhood and even people who had never been to the [farm]... So it was just a great way to get everyone involved. People showed up early to help set up... we did make phone calls and invited people to the block party, but didn’t actively ask them to help set up and people just showed up, and said, you know, “What do you need?” – Urban farmer

According to the farmers, the free, on-site community garden remains their most successful community-engagement effort. The farmers actively engage with the community gardeners and support them with resources, education, and encouragement, creating a space within the urban farming project specifically for the community.

Case 2: urban commercial farm

Located between a block of houses and a major thoroughfare, the urban commercial farm started operating in the month before the study began. Over the course of the study, the farm grew from one hoop house to several, with plans to construct a 1.5-acre hoop farm. The produce (primarily greens) is grown inside the season-extending structures. A for-profit urban farming company (UFC) and community-based organization (CBO) in the neighborhood collaborated to establish the farm. The CBO owns the farm while the UFC provides technical expertise and distributes the produce to local restaurants and institutions. Though reliant on some grant funding, the CBO aims for produce sales to support the farm financially.

The UFC and CBO leaders share a motivation to create jobs through urban farming. The UFC aims to create economically sustainable urban farms throughout Baltimore that pay living wages, a goal that aligns well with the CBO’s aim to “end poverty in the community” by creating jobs for ex-offenders residing in the neighborhood. The potential for job creation appeared to meet a primary need in the neighborhood. Resident and neighborhood leader interviewees described crime and drug activity—and the environment it engenders—as the neighborhood’s main challenge, and viewed the farm as providing youth with an alternative livelihood model:

I think one positive [of the farm] is that we’re [employing individuals] coming back from incarceration. And these are people who have lived in this community and know this community, right? ... This population becomes mentors for the younger ones in the community—examples of what the possibilities are other than drugs and crime and what traditionally is the alternative to a lot of the youth. – Neighborhood leader

Similarly, the farm manager (who grew up in the neighborhood) described his motivation to work on the farm as a desire to show his sons an alternative to dealing drugs. That said, some resident and neighborhood leader interviewees expressed dismay that farm jobs were reserved for ex-offenders, and others questioned how many jobs would actually be created.

Residents reportedly reacted to the farm with initial skepticism, arising from fears that the farm would be vandalized and attract rats, as well as concerns about its sustainability.

[E]ven though this is in the inner city... [residents] don’t wanna see an eye sore created... [Residents] fear someone coming in the neighborhood, putting something else up, promising this, promising that, and then letting it go. – Farm manager

Interviewees noted that the CBO’s role in establishing the farm helped to alleviate skepticism, presumably because well-respected community members run the CBO. Race also surfaced as a factor in the acceptance of urban farms in Baltimore. For example, one farm founder from the UFC explained that residents have “a huge amount of distrust of outsiders, and I would say white people, coming into their neighborhoods.” Although white individuals who do not reside in the (predominantly black) neighborhood run the UFC, the CBO lends the farm a local face.

There’s a lot of people from outside going to these neighborhoods and say[ing] they’re going to help out and do things, so you always see this skepticism. But

really truly going in there with [the CBO], that have already been part of that community for decades, there wasn't really a problem... – Urban farmer

Although some resident interviewees were simply glad to have an urban farm in the neighborhood, regardless of who started it, one resident farmworker was adamant that employing “local guys” to work on the farm had protected it from vandalism:

[W]e don't do good with outsiders. With you trying to start something new ... where we've been at for all these years. It wouldn't last. ... [S]o if it was just like a business, “Okay I want this land and Imma bring my own guys in and I'm going to do what I wanna do...” What happens is, vandalism would take over. ... [N]ow they have someone on the inside, you know, that is from the community, a lot of that shit cuts out... We can talk to people in our community because they're not afraid to ask us questions... Like we're what they know.... If it was only white people running this site, that shit would not last...

The UFC and CBO purportedly made few efforts to involve local residents in decision-making about the farm. The process of gaining community buy-in for the farm proposal was limited to two community meetings, during which residents were able to ask questions and voice concerns. One resident interviewee who lives adjacent to the farm did not attend these meetings and so learned about the farm by walking out of her house and seeing a hoop house under construction. One neighborhood leader critiqued the lack of community involvement and transparency in the process of establishing the farm.

Despite this limited community engagement process, residents had positive perceptions of the farm. Interviewees reported feeling pride at having the farm in their neighborhood and appreciating the farm for its novelty. Residents were also happy to see something productive done with the formerly vacant lot and commented on the potential for the farm to improve the neighborhood's reputation, largely by giving the neighborhood the appearance that “somebody cares.” As one resident interviewee noted, “it don't look like we just letting [the neighborhood] wear away and not doing anything with it.” Several responses by resident and neighborhood leaders reflected a sense that the farm “uplifts” the community by providing hope in a neighborhood where “there's so many negative things that are going on.” As one resident put it, “When you see something that's being turned from being destructive into something that's being productive, it kind of raise your spirits.”

Resident interviewees were also enthusiastic about the potential for having fresh produce in the neighborhood,

describing the local supermarket produce as “all shriveled up” and “the bottom of the barrel.” However, because the UFC sells the farm produce outside the neighborhood, residents cannot directly purchase food from the farm. Interviews with residents revealed confusion about the availability of the farm produce, with several interviewees expressing appreciation that local community members could purchase fresh vegetables in the neighborhood. Residents' unawareness regarding the lack of availability of farm produce suggests that few people had sought it out, though it is important to keep in mind that at the time of the study the farm was still quite new. In response to the lack of access by local residents to the farm produce, one neighborhood leader critiqued the city for “selling” the farm to the community on the basis of greater food access:

The city was selling it as, “Oh, it's a food desert! And ... that the people have access to excellent fresh food, organic foods and blah blah blah.” And of course, [the UFC] is saying, “Hey, this is another way we can make some money, baby!” ... The city is interested in making [itself] look better, like, “This is one of our food deserts within the city, and the people living in that area, they'll have access to fresh food.” But that's not true. At this point. ... what's created [at the farm], is not going to the community. ... It's still a food desert.

The UFC and CBO leaders recognized the need to provide local access to farm food in order to better integrate the project into the community. One CBO leader suggested this might happen in the future, for example through an on-site farmers market or gleaning orchard. Yet he also acknowledged the financial barrier to enacting these ideas, since the CBO aims to earn enough money from produce sales to financially sustain the farm and its employees.

Discussion

Viewed through the lens of the three scholarly critiques of AFIs described above, this case study of two of Baltimore's urban farms affords several insights regarding the social impact urban farms may have on local communities (summarized in Table 2).

Reflecting the first critique of AFIs as overly focused on neoliberal, market-based strategies, in this case study we glimpse the tension between the underlying tenet of civic agriculture—which prioritizes citizen participation in the food system—and the ways it is frequently enacted, i.e., via private enterprise. Entrepreneurship and local economic development are at the heart of civic agriculture, as farmers and food producers work to create linkages to local consumers. Yet unlike the industrial food system, in the civic

Table 2 Assessment of three critiques of alternative agrifood institutions as applied to two urban farm cases in Baltimore, Maryland

	Urban community farm	Urban commercial farm
Critique 1: a focus on economic, rather than civic, exchange		
Evidence of civic exchange	<p>Farmers motivated to share farm food with neighborhood residents</p> <p>Residents view farm as contributing to common good by cleaning up a vacant lot, providing education for youth, bringing community together, and providing a source of fresh produce</p> <p>Farmers emphasize community engagement over profits—though farm produce is sold, profits are reinvested in farm and produce is often shared freely</p> <p>Idea of public work embodied by farmers who work without pay and volunteerism from local community</p> <p>Farmers sought input/support from local residents before establishing farm</p> <p>Local residents invited to participate in free community garden where decisions made jointly</p> <p>Public space created through substantial interaction between farmers and community members</p>	<p>Farmers motivated to create local jobs, aligning with neighborhood's need to provide young men with alternative models for employment</p> <p>Residents view farm as contributing to neighborhood by creating something positive that is a source of neighborhood pride</p>
Evidence of focus on private enterprise	<p>Overall ownership of, vision for, and decision-making about farm lays with farmers</p>	<p>Produce not sold within neighborhood</p> <p>Priority placed on financial sustainability</p> <p>Community input not sought during farm planning process</p> <p>Little evidence exists that farm creates public space</p> <p>Overall ownership of, vision for, and decision-making about farm lays with UFC and CBO</p>
Critique 2: inequity in the accessibility of alternative food		
Evidence of efforts toward food equity	<p>Farmers motivated by need to share farm produce with broader community</p> <p>Farm produce made available to local residents through neighborhood farm stand and CSA</p> <p>Farm accepts federal food aid benefits to make food affordable</p> <p>Free plots at associated community garden provide space for residents to grow their own food</p> <p>Wide variety of produce grown appeals to diverse consumers</p>	<p>Farmers' recognized importance of providing local community with access to affordable fresh produce and hoped to do so in the future</p>
Evidence of food inequity	<p>Few residents purchase farm food, purportedly due to hesitancy to eat food grown in a formerly trash-filled lot</p>	<p>Farmers prioritize job creation over food equity</p> <p>Farm produce not accessible to residents</p> <p>Crops selected for their appeal to high-end purchasers</p>
Critique 3: white dominance and social exclusion within alternative agrifood institutions		
Evidence of social inclusiveness	<p>Decision to start farm made with substantial community input</p> <p>Farmers make numerous efforts to create a welcoming environment and include residents in farm activities, including through community events that draw much of the neighborhood</p> <p>Farmers' dedication to neighborhood changed residents' perceptions about who the farm serves—now seen as a community project</p>	<p>Primary farm managers are black and from the (predominantly black) neighborhood</p> <p>Well-known CBO partner creates a sense of trust in the project</p> <p>Residents expressed interest in eating farm food, describing it as higher quality than conventional supermarket produce</p>
Evidence of potential social exclusion	<p>Farmers are white; neighborhood is predominantly black</p> <p>Challenges in marketing produce suggests lack of interest by residents in obtaining food through an urban farm</p>	<p>Decision to start farm made with minimal community input</p> <p>Aside from potential job creation, efforts not made to involve local residents</p> <p>Although residents expressed interest in purchasing farm produce, a lack of awareness that it was not available indicates that they had not tried to access it</p>

agriculture approach, considerations such as equity and environmental protection are given equal weight to economic efficiency and productivity, as civic farmers work to improve community welfare (Lyson 2004). With its focus on income-generation, urban farming has an inherent market orientation, but like many participants in urban agriculture, urban farmers aim to solve a range of environmental, health, and social issues (Birky and Strom 2013; Dimitri et al. 2016). Consistent with prior research, study findings reveal a blurring of economic and social goals in the two farm cases (Dimitri et al. 2016), but a closer inspection reveals that, on balance, social motives are ultimately paramount in these ventures.

In the community farm case, the farmers prioritize civic exchange over economic goals, as evidenced by their motivation to share farm produce with the neighborhood, their efforts to gain community buy-in before establishing the farm, and their engagement of local residents as community members, rather than consumers. Although the community itself does not own or run the farm, the farmers prioritize the needs expressed by neighborhood residents and integrate residents' input. In turn, residents view the farm as contributing to neighborhood improvement, particularly by alleviating the trash problem. The community farmers also embody the idea of public work—the essential element espoused by DeLind (2002) for engendering civic engagement—by volunteering their labor to contribute to the farm's development and neighborhood improvement. To some degree, the farm also creates public space through the involvement of committed neighborhood residents who participate in the community garden and volunteer at farm events.

In many ways, the urban commercial farm appears to prioritize economic interests over community engagement. Community acceptance, rather than input, was sought in the establishment of the farm, and its produce remains unavailable to local residents due to the need to sell the produce at a price high enough to sustain the farm economically. Public work is not evident at the commercial farm, and with minimal interaction with the neighborhood, the farm does not appear to create public space. But to describe the commercial farm as focused on private enterprise ignores the fact that a social goal lies at the heart of the project as the CBO works to create jobs for ex-offenders in the neighborhood. The CBO's emphasis on economic goals reflects a view of food production as a means of meeting goals other than propagating a food citizenry. This does not necessarily diminish the potential for the commercial farm to promote public interests, and in fact, residents view the farm as helping to uplift the community. Consistent with Dimitri and colleagues' (2016) research findings, food is the "vehicle" the urban commercial farm uses to try to improve the community. Along

these lines, research by Chung et al. (2005) demonstrates that the prioritization of economic goals over civic engagement does not preclude the creation of civic space. Their comparison of a publically-funded community garden with a privately-owned for-profit farm revealed it is not specific characteristics, such as for-profit or non-profit, that foster civic participation, but rather the creation of a spirit of collective work. Developing collective activities that purposefully engage the surrounding community could reorient the commercial farm as a forum for civic agriculture while maintaining its overarching focus on job creation.

In terms of the second critique regarding inequity in the accessibility of alternative food, this case study highlights the differential capacity of urban farms to address food equity. Scholars argue that having a market orientation limits AFI's capacity to provide equal access to local food, privileging affluent consumers over less affluent ones (Mares and Alkon 2011). With an aim to remain financially sustainable constraining the CBO's ability to address food equity, the urban commercial farm fell into this model. Although CBO leaders expressed a desire to provide farm food access in the low-income neighborhood that houses the farm, at the time of the study, produce was only sold outside the neighborhood to more affluent customers. In contrast, the community farmers make substantial efforts to produce food that is accessible, affordable, and desired by community members. However, these activities are possible because the farm receives grant funding, leaving the future viability of the farm at the whims of funders. These two cases underscore an important question for further research, one with which the urban agriculture community grapples: Can an urban farm provide low-income customers access to affordable food while remaining financially sustainable? Recent research suggests that socially oriented urban farms may, in fact, achieve greater economic viability under a nonprofit model, which allows farms to prioritize social goals over production (Dimitri et al. 2016).

In response to the third critique, that racial privilege pervades some AFIs, this case study reveals that urban farmers differ in their recognition of the importance of social inclusiveness and how their farms achieve community buy-in. Research conducted in Philadelphia has shown that urban farming is perceived by some as a practice run by young white people, a perception that can unintentionally exclude people of color (Meenar and Hoover 2012). Similarly, in Baltimore, young whites run many of Baltimore's urban farms, with farms located where vacant land is available—generally, low-income, predominantly black neighborhoods. This case study (and the larger research project—see Poulsen et al. 2014) demonstrates how Baltimore's urban farmers understand their status as "outsiders," and illustrates how they actively engage neighborhood residents to seek input and involvement. In the community

farm case, although the white farmers did not originally reside in the predominantly black neighborhood that houses the farm, they went to great lengths to ensure the farm was a welcome addition to the neighborhood before breaking ground. The farmers demonstrated their commitment to the neighborhood, ultimately changing residents' perceptions about whose interests the farm serves. They also strive to create a welcoming environment at the farm, such as hosting a variety of activities and events, in order to create a space for the entire neighborhood to enjoy. The commercial farm did not achieve a similar level of community engagement, for the CBO leaders made few efforts to connect residents to the farm. Instead, the CBO capitalized on the trust it had previously established within the neighborhood to gain community acceptance. Hiring local residents to work at the farm further ensured the project would be viewed as a community project.

Scholars have also questioned whether AFIs appeal to the poor and people of color (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008a). Though residents from both study sites spoke positively about urban farm food and the convenience of having a local source of fresh produce in the neighborhood, study findings reveal the community farmers struggled to sell their produce within the neighborhood, and residents interviewed at the commercial farm site were not aware that produce was not sold within the neighborhood. These findings may suggest a lack of interest by residents in obtaining food through an urban farm or in eating the types of food grown, or the existence of structural barriers that constrain residents' ability to purchase and prepare fresh produce. Urban farming is frequently promoted as a solution to food deserts by providing a local source of fresh produce. However, neither case provides evidence for the success of this strategy. Future research should investigate the appeal of urban farm food to a range of consumers, as well as the structural barriers that may limit consumption of food grown at urban farms.

One limitation of this study is the relative infancy of the commercial farm case, constraining the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the farm's social impacts. I included it in the study despite this limitation because it provided a useful contrast to the community farm. Furthermore, data collection occurred over the course of a year, and the findings that emerged during later interviews and observations mirrored those at earlier time points, strengthening my confidence in the findings from the commercial farm study site. The triangulation of data collection methods and sources was a particular strength of this research, facilitating a deep exploration of the embedding of urban farms in the social context of the city. However, these two cases should not be taken as representative of all urban farms.

Conclusion

Critiques of AFIs question whether these institutions, when put into practice, are participatory, equitable, or socially inclusive. In this paper, I aimed to build upon this scholarship by assessing the applicability of these critiques to urban farming, an increasingly popular form of urban agriculture. As Reynolds (2015) recently argued, without such critical examination, it is all too easy to be swept up in the dominant narrative of urban farming as a tool for improving food access, creating jobs, and enhancing public health, and to conflate these social benefits with social justice. Through this case study of two distinct models of urban farming, I sought to understand the degree to which urban farming aligns with the ideal of civic agriculture as a form of locally based agriculture linked to the social development of a community, and the strategies urban farmers use to put civic agriculture into practice.

Findings reveal the community farmers prioritize civic exchange over economic goals, embody the idea of public work through their commitment to neighborhood improvement, prioritize food access in the low-income neighborhood surrounding the farm, and strive to create a socially inclusive space through ongoing community engagement efforts. In sum, the urban community farm closely aligns with the aims of civic agriculture, providing an example of food production rooted in the local social context that builds bonds with local communities through purposeful engagement and the integration of community needs.

Although the community farm largely overcomes the critiques of AFIs outlined in this paper, with leadership for the farm coming from neighborhood "outsiders" (in a city highly conscious of neighborhood boundaries), questions remain as to whether such an approach truly accomplishes the collective culture of work needed to increase the equity of food access. As Bernard-Carreño (2015) delineates, in order to overcome inequities, the people being advocated for must play a central role in decision-making in order to define problems "accurately and authentically." Urban farms are likely to achieve greater civic engagement when they are run by the very people they serve. For example, Detroit's D-Town Farm was established by and for African Americans in order to improve community food insecurity and build greater self-reliance, needs identified from within the community (White 2011). With volunteer farmworkers providing labor for the farm, D-Town Farm exemplifies public work that builds the sense of community necessary for civic engagement. Returning to the community farm case, can two white "outsiders" with good intentions build this same sense of community in a predominantly black neighborhood? Perhaps not fully, but their self-awareness

of the need to create an inclusive environment at the farm, willingness to proactively engage with local residents, and emphasis of civic goals (as opposed to economic goals) has engendered community participation with the farm. Notably, with few preconceptions for how the farm would operate, the farmers could adapt it to meet the desires of local residents. In the absence of greater representation by people of color, such flexibility may be critical in offsetting the whiteness and social exclusivity of urban farming and other AFIs.

The urban commercial farm presents a more complex case. In many ways, it fails to overcome the critiques of AFIs discussed in this paper, though not due to a lack of responsiveness to the local socioeconomic context. By deprioritizing community engagement, the farm lacks the participatory processes central to civic agriculture. Furthermore, the CBO's emphasis on economic sustainability constrains the farm's ability to address food equity in the neighborhood. Yet as a necessary part of meeting the aim of creating jobs for ex-offenders residing in the neighborhood, this economic focus reflects the framing of food production as a means to meet a social goal other than civic engagement with the food system. Revisiting Bernard-Carreño's (2015) argument that problems related to food access can only be accurately defined from within a community, we see that with management of the farm coming from the CBO, the neighborhood's needs have been authentically defined. These needs simply center on job creation for vulnerable residents rather than the food access goals AFIs typically strive to meet. Furthermore, due to the CBO's leadership role, residents view the commercial farm as a community project despite its economic focus. The farm also provides a counter-example of the current trend of white privilege in urban agriculture.

This analysis indicates that the "failure" of the urban commercial farm to put civic agriculture fully into practice stems not from an overemphasis of financial goals, but rather from a discounting of the importance of building bonds between the farm and local consumers. It is through these connections that the civic agriculture approach strengthens communities and engenders citizen participation in the food system. Dig Deep Farm & Produce in the East Bay Area of California provides an example of an urban farm that has merged job creation with food justice goals, thus coming closer to putting civic agriculture into practice. Like the CBO, the Dig Deep founders sought to address crime and create jobs for low-income community members, and relied on local sales, including sales to high-end restaurants, rather than grant funds to finance the farm (Bradley and Galt 2014). Yet the founders of Dig Deep also aimed to improve food access for area residents. They worked from the outset to create a local consumer base for the farm's CSA, researching local foodways to avoid

making assumptions about community members' food preferences. A similar approach could foster the civic participation the urban commercial farm lacks while also promoting food equity in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the future utility of the job skills transferred through work at an urban farm in part depends on living in a city that values fresh local produce. Therefore, nurturing food citizenship within the local community may help to ensure the long-term value of such training, the existence of urban farming jobs, and the viability of the farm.

As a bounded system of food production that is highly intertwined with the local context, urban farming, at face value, appears to exemplify the original vision of civic agriculture. This case study has presented two distinct models of urban farming that are both highly attuned to the local social context, but with differing underlying motivations and business models, they are not equally participatory, equitable, or inclusive. Through this case study, we also glimpse the complexity of evaluating urban farms with these criteria, precisely due to the embeddedness of urban farms within the local context. Despite this challenge, we should continue to confront tensions between the ideals of civic agriculture and the practice of urban farming, particularly as urban farming evolves. Through the use of agriculture technology, the purported "urban farming boom" is shifting food production from vacant land to vertical farms, rooftops, and shipping containers (Hepler 2015). Without an opportunity for urban farmers and food citizens to co-mingle, this physical shift may well be coupled with a shift in the underlying motivation for urban farming, from serving local community needs to meeting a market demand. Although the urban farms presented in this case study differed substantially in the degree to which they put civic agriculture into practice, both provide examples of projects physically and philosophically rooted in the local social context, necessary characteristics for promoting civic engagement with the food system.

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