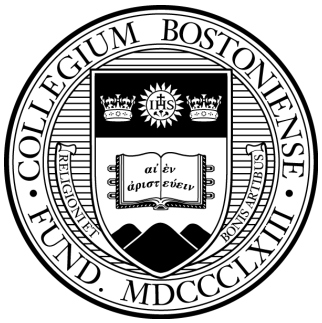

Individual Motivations and Impacts of Community Agriculture Participation in Suburban Boston: A Case Study

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Abstract

Urban and community agriculture projects have long been touted as harboring the cure for a range of social maladies, even as recent findings show that many such projects mainly benefit White, already economically secure people. Drawing on interviews from participants and staff members of a community farm, I examine how this farm fits into the overall narrative surrounding community agriculture, as well as the diverse motivations participants have for joining the farm and the impacts stemming from their involvement. Results show proximity and interest to be the most frequent motivations for initial involvement, while participants noted changes in eating habits and self-perceptions from their participation. Additionally, consistent with previous literature, I identify themes regarding participants' alignment with eco-habitus and issues of accessibility for certain populations. These findings open the door for further research on the interplay between motivation and impacts, and how that is influenced by farm operations.

Introduction

Urban agriculture (UA), defined by Wagstaff and Wortman (2013) as "all forms of agricultural production (food and non-food products) occurring within or around cities," has been heralded by scholars and food justice advocates alike, as having the potential to heal social divisions of race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status (Angotti 2015; McIvor and Hale 2015), while also contributing to increased urban food security, environmental sustainability, positive health outcomes (Classens 2015), and public spaces (Napawan 2015). Studies have also found that those positive impacts that UA projects potentially have on communities can also act as motivating factors for participants' initial motivation for involvement (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010).

Despite being touted as harboring the cure for many areas of injustice, a number of scholars and food justice advocates alike have recently been increasingly critical of the actual implementation and effects of UA projects. Increasingly, studies have found that these projects have a tendency to reproduce the very systemic inequalities that urban and community agriculture were meant to dismantle. That is, these projects tend to result in benefit for White, economically secure, and healthy consumers, through legitimation of positive UA narratives and reproduction of whiteness and white values within implementation methods (Broad 2016; Classens 2015; Poulsen 2017; Guthman 2008; Reynolds 2015).

To better understand how urban agriculture is experienced and understood, this article focuses on a case study of a community farm in the greater Boston, Massachusetts area to explore how this farm fits into the narrative of community agriculture, as well as the array of motivations that participants have for joining the farm, and the impacts resulting from their involvement. Based on interview data (N = 11), I show that many aspects and outcomes of the

farm align with those described in previous literature, given the demographics both of my sample, and of the area in which the farm is located geographically. Similarly, participants' motivations for joining and the impacts from their involvement are also congruent with previous findings.

Theoretical Framework

I use several theoretical frameworks to investigate how Greater Boston Organics Farm impacts participants differently, as well as what participants' motivations were for initial involvement. To address these questions, I draw on political ecology and cultural sociology literatures, as well as the food sovereignty perspective.

The political ecology framework is an interdisciplinary approach that initially emerged in the 1980s, combining environmental studies, economics, and the social sciences (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2019; Minch 2011; Neumann 2009). With the original intention of analyzing environmental problems through concepts of the political economy (Neumann 2009), political ecology scholars have used the framework to reveal how materiality, culture, and discourses around nature shape international and urban development, and urban politics (Classens 2015). The framework believed that "ecological change cannot be understood without consideration of the political and economic structures and institutions within which it is embedded" (Neumann 2009: 1). This interdisciplinary approach enables this framework to expand the definition of environment to include the social processes that take place within that environment and acknowledge the interactions among those processes as a complex system of natural, cultural, political and ideological environments (McMahan & Nichter 2011). The interactions between those factors emphasize the ways in which political ecology recognizes how political, social, and economic costs and benefits stemming from environmental change are unevenly distributed

among a population and therefore affect the status quo (Bryant & Bailey 1997; McMahan & Nichter 2011).

Using this lens to examine the ways in which farm participants felt their lives had been influenced by their participation there highlights how those impacts stem from pre-existing power relations. In particular, previous studies suggest a potentially key role of power-relations as they have to do with race and socioeconomic status. One key aim of this research is therefore to understand how the farm's model and operations influence those power relations by either reinforcing or reducing structural inequalities.

A cultural sociological lens is similar insofar as it takes a variety of factors into account when examining how people and groups respond to environmental crises, thus making it a useful perspective in which to examine this case study. Particularly relevant to my case, in the 1960s and 1970s, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of "habitus," or the way that people behave through a set of embodied dispositions in reaction to the surrounding world (Inglis 2021; Kennedy & Givens 2019). More recent cultural sociologists, noting the importance of considering environmental beliefs within the contexts in which they occur, have suggested that a cultural lens allows a better understanding of action and inaction in response to environmental crises because of the ways the collective shapes individual actions and beliefs (Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019). These scholars have also taken Bourdieu's concept of habitus and coined the term "eco-habitus," as a proposition that an orientation to sustainably produced products will come from those of higher cultural capital (Kennedy & Givens 2019). They contend that ethical consumption is a product of cultural norms surrounding the embeddedness of markets and the emotions that surround consumption and identities, which are

both also highly influenced by what people feel are viable options for environmental crisis action (Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019; Varul 2021).

Similarly to political ecology, the cultural sociological perspective is of importance in examining how the participants in my case study interact with the farm and its offerings, such as events, CSA, and volunteer opportunities. This lens allows for taking the background demographics, such as culture and class dimensions, of my participants into account when examining what their initial intent was for joining the farm, as well as the impact that it ended up having on them.

Taken together, analyzing my case through a combination of political ecology and cultural sociology frameworks allows for a more holistics examination of how the farm fits into the narrative about urban and community agriculture projects, as well as how it strays from previous findings.

Previous Literature

Recent years have brought a rapid increase in the number of urban agriculture projects throughout the U.S., and the global north as a whole, bringing to the forefront of scholarly investigation topics of food justice as they relate to environmental/spatial justice, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Urban agriculture, or UA as it is commonly referred to in the literature, is the production of agricultural products in or around urban areas (Little 2019). In terms of what qualifies as "urban," the US Census Bureau (2020) define urban areas as "densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses" and can "include the city itself, as well as surrounding areas," (Rutledge et al. 2011). That means that by those definitions, anything from a small personal garden to a larger scale

community farm with animals, anywhere within the greater part of a city, qualifies as UA, despite the difference in scales between the two.

Motivations for joining UA programs

Studies have shown how, while at times over-praised, the individual and societal level benefits of UA programs (which will be discussed shortly) often play into the reasons that individuals choose to join or participate in community agriculture projects. Some of the most frequently stated motivations for participation included access to fresh foods, enjoyment of nature and relaxation, health benefits, opportunities to socialize, support conservation of green spaces, and an opportunity to give back to the community the project is located in (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010). In their analysis of community garden literature, for example, Draper and Freedman (2010) found that 20% of the articles they reviewed explicitly stated that open space or preservation were seen as a benefit or motivation for joining, and another 15% of the articles they analyzed mentioned enjoyment or relaxation as motivation.

Potential Impacts of Urban Agriculture Projects

Public Spaces & Community Building

Urban agriculture projects have been found to share similar goals and needs as public spaces, including strong neighborhood connection, accessible perimeters, and a site design that promotes a diverse group of users, indicating that they hold the ability to act as both places of food production and public spaces (Napawan 2015). Public spaces, especially those like UA, provide an opportunity for people to come together as a community, united under a common goal. These opportunities for cultivating lasting relationships by working together for a common goal, or simply seeing familiar faces, harbors the potential to bridge divides of age, gender, race, and class (Angotti 2015; McIvor and Hale 2015), while also deepening community members'

social capital (Hoover 2013). Many UA projects integrate additional social programming and events into their organizations, further increasing community involvement and acting to help bridge traditional racial and social divides by bringing together people who would not otherwise socialize (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010). Armstrong (2000) even found that, of the 63 gardens surveyed, community garden coordinators reported that attitudes of residents toward their neighborhood improved 51%, which would likely have a huge effect on their outlook of their neighbors. The capacity of UA projects as public spaces and for community building is particularly notable, as Zhang et al. 's 2018 study discovered that number of public spaces was positively correlated with personal well-being and resilience, especially among older adults, with a strong sense of community acting as mediator for those results.

Health Benefits

UA also offers the opportunity for health benefits, partly because these projects are an opportunity for community members to get outside and into nature. Numerous studies have noted how people are generally happier when they are outside, in green, natural spaces, rather than urban areas (Carrus et al. 2015; Finlay et al. 2015; Gilbert 2016; White et al. 2013; Williams 2017). Having natural spaces available to enjoy makes peoples' mental health better and can also decrease overall health inequalities between the rich and the poor (Gilbert 2016) due to these increased feelings of well-being and elevated levels of physical activity (Carrus et al. 2015; Finlay et al. 2015; White et al. 2013). This is especially important to consider in the design of cities, where there are traditionally limited green spaces available to communities of lower socioeconomic status (Hoffimann, Barros, and Ribeiro 2017). With UA in particular there comes an increase in physical activity through the act of gardening, which has been shown to hold a number of health benefits (Armstrong 2000; Soga, Gaston, and Yamaura 2017).

In addition to the physical activity aspect associated with urban agriculture, studies have found that those who participate in community gardening have an increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables (Armstrong 2000; Classens 2015; Draper & Freedman 2010). In a study where 766 adults were surveyed and asked about their fruit and vegetable consumption, results showed that adults with a household member that participated with a community garden consumed 1.4 times more fruits and vegetables per day than those who did not participate in community gardening projects (Alaimo et al. 2008). Additionally, the studies have also noted that individuals that participate in community gardening eat fewer sweet foods and drinks than those who do actively participate in the projects (Alaimo et al. 2008; Armstrong 2000).

Reproduction of Systemic Inequalities

Neoliberal Strategies

Despite the potential for "increased urban food security, environmental sustainability, and positive health outcomes" (Classens 2015: 230), the reality of UA does not always meet these goals. A number of scholars have pointed to the constraints of neoliberalism that have been placed upon urban agriculture projects, hindering the extent to which they can meet their true goals (Alkon and Mares 2012; Classens 2015; Mares and Alkon 2011). Using the market-based solutions the neoliberal economics promotes often makes local food a commodity that only those able to pay are able to get (Bernard-Carreño 2015; Kennedy & Johnston 2019; Mares and Alkon 2011), resulting in a reproduction of food inequality for lower-income communities and communities of color. Urging consumers to choose economic alternatives, albeit locally based alternatives, rather than encouraging them to actively reform the food system itself "signals a lack of critical understanding of neoliberalism that can undermine efforts to create greater access to local/sustainable food" (Mares and Alkon 2011: 77). Even when a UA program is specifically

meant to target food-insecure populations, the use of market-based approaches which often commodify local food, can exclude those very residents who were most in need, despite them recognizing the value in the produce being sold (Alkon and Mares 2012).

Creation of White Values and Spaces

Failing to recognize systemic racial and economic inequity within the neoliberal food system, many alternative food initiatives have been found to mainly benefit white, economically secure, healthy communities (Broad 2016; Hoover 2013). Even with their physical location in communities of color, UA projects are often a reproduction of whiteness and white values, such as through language, culture, and food variety, with some studies even finding that the majority of those participating at community farms are white (Draper & Freedman 2010; Guthman 2008; Horst, McClintock & Hoey 2017; Hoover 2013), signaling the project as being a source of community for the white, economically secure population rather than the community in need (Bernard-Carreño 2015: 190). As Pedroni (2011) reiterates, the addition of greenspaces with the romanticized notion of a "return to nature" (p. 212), as UA often promotes, acts to bring to fruition "the white imaginary," and wash away the "discursive blackness" of a city.

Socially motivated UA projects, rather than economically motivated ones, are more likely to be located in lower income neighborhoods, and donate larger proportions of their produce (Dimitri, Oberholtzer, and Pressman 2016). However, in part due to the white values embodied in this romanticized version of agriculture, studies have noted a lack of interest by residents of color in obtaining farm food (Guthman 2008; Poulsen 2017). Some community members expressed disgust and even anger at the idea of gardening their own food, or eating organic produce (Guthman 2008). Additionally, even within socially oriented community farms there are issues of the distribution of produce due to embedded forms of exclusion and appropriation

within their stated missions of self-empowerment (Tornaghi 2017), exacerbating the reproduction of systemic race-based disparities.

Eco-habitus and Conscious Consumerism

Similar to what was discussed previously in regards to how UA projects have sometimes had a tendency to reproduce white values and create white spaces, a number of studies have examined how these factors are tied to, and contribute to, inequality. Coming from the idea of "habitus," or a "system of embodied dispositions that organizes how people perceive and react to the world around the," (Kennedy & Givens 2019: 3), scholars have begun using the term "eco-habitus" to describe the way in which people of high cultural capital orient themselves toward sustainable products and practices.

Studies have found that those with higher levels of cultural capital had a strong eco-habitus and were more inclined to identify as "conscious consumers," incorporating environmental awareness and sustainability into their everyday practices, while also assuming that the practices they utilize are universally achievable (Carfagna et al. 2014; Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019). Those practicing this conscious consumerism are also typically "more female, Whiter, richer, and much more educated than the general population" (Carfagna et al. 2014: 163). Scholars have found that this type of eco-habitus has been employed in the preference for local businesses and products, as well as food. Guthman (2003) even notes how "the making of taste" is dependent upon the very social processes which produce food distribution inequities and diet variations amongst groups. She notes how that has also been a shaping factor in both identity and social rank, so not only are these food preferences largely utilized by those with higher cultural capital, but the very act of their conscious consumerism works to reinforce and recreate exclusionary practices (Carfagna et al. 2014).

Aspects of Successful UA Programs

In spite of the difficult realities currently faced by many UA programs, there are examples of flourishing urban agriculture endeavors that provide useful practical and theoretical insights on how other programs can follow in their success.

Food Sovereignty Perspectives

A number of scholars have noted that the current framing of food justice programs in neoliberal terms is problematic, as it tends to sabotage the goals of UA work that employ it. They argue that in order to counteract the capitalistic logic currently reproducing broader systemic inequalities (ie. racial and economic disparities), the UA movement needs to challenge neoliberal urbanism, and suggest that reframing urban agriculture projects within a perspective of food sovereignty would significantly strengthen growing food movements (Alkon and Mares 2012; Mares and Alkon 2011; Tornaghi 2017). Food sovereignty and food justice/community food security perspectives share a number of goals, such as support for local production, consumption, and control over food and agricultural systems (Alkon and Mares 2012), though food sovereignty takes it one step further by actively advocating for the dismantling of the neoliberal policies that enable the continued domination by the corporate food regime (Mares and Alkon 2011). Thus, should UA initiatives aiming to combat food insecurity shift from capitalist oriented solutions to one of food sovereignty, they would likely have greater success in achieving their stated goals of food and social justice.

Community Involvement and Partnerships

Strong community support for the project as a whole is vital to its success, coming from both community members and local stores where residents frequently shop. As Gudzune and colleagues (2015) found in their study of partnerships between two different local stores and two

community farms, variety of produce options and level of freshness were positively associated with the amount that was sold, indicating that these types of partnerships have the potential to increase produce access by low-income neighborhoods. Other studies have additionally pushed back on the hypothesis that, because food desert residents respond to product prices in the same way that non-food desert residents do, it must be due to demand side factors such as residents' distaste for fresh produce, that is to blame for the creation of food deserts. These studies have found that it is actually because food desert residents face different sets of constraints than their non-food desert counterparts, that it is both demand and supply side factors that inhibit their produce consumption (Weatherspoon et al. 2015). Taking that into consideration, it would then seem logical that when residents were actively involved in the decision making processes, especially in regards to which stores would be most practical to partner with, community farms and UA initiatives in general would prove significantly more effective in achieving their goals.

With more leadership opportunities presented to them, residents, being knowledgeable of the cultural backgrounds within their neighborhoods, would also be able to choose to grow foods they knew their neighbors would eat, and understand how to cook. For example, to attract Black customers to the West Oakland Farmers Market, vendors highlight aspects of Black culture and offer culturally appropriate foods such as okra and black eyed peas (Alkon and Mares 2012), steps that have been shown to be of major importance in achieving full security of quality of food in low income, minority neighborhoods (Guthman 2008).

Local Governmental Actors

Other scholars have pointed to local governments' roles in addressing urban food insecurity and the inadvertent effects that some UA projects have had on the communities they were meant to support. Though at the local level there is seemingly little that can truly be done to

alleviate the issue on a large scale, by reforming certain mandates, local city governments have begun addressing the lack of foresight that urban planning has had regarding the food system (Morgan 2015; Horst, McClintock, and Hoey 2017; Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). For example, municipalities can provide incentives for UA, such as preferential property tax assessments or reduced permitting fees. Additionally, they can adopt goals and strategies explicitly including urban agriculture within the framework in order to support new opportunities for noncommercial UA, as Seattle, Washington did. The city government of Seattle, Washington "prioritized new community garden and farm investments in neighborhoods with a high proportion of low-income people of color," while providing some staff members for nearly 90 permanently protected farms both on public and private land, in addition to offering grants for use in enhancing or developing community farms or gardens (Horst, McClintock, and Hoey 2017: 278).

Similarly, to fight back against the inadvertent effect of gentrification that sometimes comes after the development of urban agriculture projects, food justice advocates in a number of cities have worked with their local governments to lobby for policies to create affordable housing for vulnerable populations, and ensure that urban agriculture policy benefits communities of color (Alkon, Cadji and Moore 2019). These measures taken by local governments and activists point towards a future of effective UA initiatives should others follow suit in working to mitigate the unintended consequences that have become the reality of many projects.

In sum, previous literature has examined, from different perspectives, what contributes to positive and negative urban agriculture outcomes. I contribute by collecting original interview data to gain a better understanding of what influences the impacts that community farm participation has on the individual. Additionally, this interview data reveals participants'

motivations for involvement in the community agriculture project, thus supplying additional support for those motivations found in previous studies.

Data and Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design, examining a community farm in the greater Boston area. I will call the farm Greater Boston Organics Farm, which is located in a greater Boston, Massachusetts area suburb. I selected this farm because of its mission statement, location, and neighborhood demographics. The farm has historic origins, having been constructed in 1638, though it had the majority of the original acreage subdivided and sold off for development later on. It was with the help of the Town (the town where the farm is located) that the farm was able to be rehabilitated for use in 2007. Additionally, this particular farm was chosen for the case study because of its mission emphasizing community building, education, and sustainable agriculture: "[The Greater Boston Organics Farm] builds broad community and seeks to model sustainable practices through active learning, organic agriculture, land stewardship, and an appreciation of our historic New England farm" (Mission n.d.). What also makes this community farm an interesting case study are the demographics of the suburb in which it is located, in relation to those of the greater Boston area. The area is one of the wealthiest municipalities in the state, with racial demographics that are predominantly White and Asian, with a median household income levels more than double that of the city of Boston as a whole (Quick Facts Boston 2019). Similarly, the percentage of residents reported as "white alone" is significantly higher (80.9%) than that of the city of Boston (52.8%) (Quick Facts Boston 2019). Because of these disparities, it is likely that despite upholding a community farm model and mission similar to others in the greater Boston area, Greater Boston Organics Farm is responding to a different set of needs within their community, and thus the farm activity

participants will receive different benefits and impacts than they would if they joined a farm in a less demographically homogeneous area.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data from December 2020 to February 2021. Prior to data collection, I obtained IRB approval for the study. To gain an in-depth understanding of the context of each farm and the experiences that participants came with, I conducted in-depth interviews with seven farm activity participants and four farm staff members. Farm staff members were purposively selected for interviews. As for farm activity participants, an advertisement of the research was sent by my farm contact to the farm email list, and those who responded to the advertisement were subsequently interviewed. Interviews were semi-structured following prompts from a mostly open-ended discussion guide, though a few questions were close-ended questions wherein participants were often asked to elaborate. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked a set of demographic questions relating to gender, race, age, level of education, marital status, and number of children. Interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes and took place on the virtual conferencing platforms of Zoom and Google Meet depending on the participant's preference, and one took place over the phone without video. Participants were presented with, and signed, a written consent document containing the required information prior to participating in the study. All but one of the interviews were recorded via the online conferencing platform recording feature, and transcribed verbatim, and for the one that refused recording I took detailed notes of responses and pulled quotes during the interview. Research data, such as recordings, and transcripts were kept on a secure, password protected personal laptop, wherein the data and cross-references were also kept in separate files.

Data Analysis and Data Quality

To analyze the community farm's impacts on their activity participants, I coded interview transcripts and relevant documents using an inductive coding scheme. Codes consisted of themes related to: participants' decision to take an active role with the farm; prior awareness of farming practices; how participation affected eating habits, feelings of self, and relationships with community members; thoughts about the success of Greater Boston Organics' mission and accessibility. Themes were discovered by compiling transcript data into memos from each participant that included relevant information. I then compiled the coded data into a summary report of the themes for the farm. Once these themes were discovered, I then analyzed how participation with the farm impacted individuals, based on their responses about motivation for joining the farm. Finally, I compared the themes regarding impressions of Greater Boston Organics between activity participants and staff members.

The credibility of this research was reinforced by the triangulation of data. When combined with prior literature, this allowed a more complete understanding of how individuals' motivations for using the farm influence the impacts that the farm has on them. Additionally, conducting interviews among different participant types (i.e., farm staff and general farm activity participants) strengthened my confidence in the reliability and adequacy of data saturation.

Results

Participants' Demographics

All of the interview participants in this study self-identified as White or Caucasian (N=11), and six of the seven general farm activity participants were female (N=6), while three of the four farm staff members were female (N=3). The ages of farm activity participants ranged from 30s to 70, with two participants between the ages of 30-40 (N=2), two between the ages of 50-60 (N=2), and three between the ages of 60-70 (N=3). Most of the participants reported

having children (N=5), and the majority reported being currently married (N=4), while one had never been married (N=1), and two were no longer married (N=2). Additionally, Master's Degrees were the most commonly reported highest level of education (N=5), though one had completed a Bachelor's Degree (N=1), and another a PhD (N=1).

Participants' Motivation to Take on an Active Role

When asked what made them decide to take on an active role in participating at farm-led events, one of the most common answers had to do with the farm's location in relation to the participant's own home (N=5). For example, one participant said that,

> "*... when I moved to Winchester it was just… a couple miles away. It seemed like a no-brainer to try and take advantage of it if I could. So I guess that's why…*"

Another also said,

> "*... every time I go over there from [my new house in], and I'm not that far where I live in [now] either, but not as close as [where I lived before], and every time I drive over I'm like 'this was faster [where I lived before].*"

These quotes indicate that their initial involvement was largely due to their home's proximity to the farm.

Having an initial interest in the subjects that surround the farm (N=5), such as farming/gardening, fresh produce, and the environment and sustainability was equally as prevalent. When asked directly what made them take on an active role at farm-led events, one participant said, "*... probably because I'm interested in the environment, and trees, and food, and animals…*". Another noted that they "*... value open space and the food I eat, and the work that farms do…*" in their reasoning for initial participation.

The next most frequent answer related to having a desire to maintain healthy eating or local produce consumption (N=2). For example, one said,

"the way I grew up my family ate healthy and ate a lotta vegetables, loved vegetables, so it was kinda a natural thing to ya know, gravitate towards that."

Similarly, another explained that they were raised to be a *"conscious consumer or mindful consumer."* Not wanting the land to go to development is also voiced by two participants, with one of them saying,

"... probably the biggest thing was thing was I just couldn't bear to see this last beautiful farm go to housing."

Other less mentioned reasons had to do with feeling welcomed (N=1), seeking out farm-specific volunteering (N=1), and the closure of another farm due to the COVID-19 pandemic (N=1).

Previous Awareness & Participation in Farming Process

Addressing the question of whether farm activity participants had been aware of or had participated in farming related activities prior to their engagement with Greater Boston Organics, all but one respondent indicated that they had at least some level of awareness beforehand, whether it be through participation at other farms, or general knowledge of sustainability and the food system, or personal gardens (N=6). The most common type of awareness of farming processes came from those who reported having actively participated at other farms before coming to Greater Boston Organics (N=3), with one participant noting,

"Wherever I am I like to be involved with some sort of volunteering if I can around farming and food… [so] I had helped at farms similarly to [Greater

Boston Organics Farm] before, in other places, so I had a general sense of what I was going to be doing."

Three less frequent types of responses were about having been aware of matters of sustainability (N=2) or the food system (N= 2), or having personal gardens (N=2).

One participant who noted a number of these previous ways of awareness said, "*Coming out of college I just gradually became more aware of sort of sustainability and where food comes from and why it matters… I was part of a local co-op in [multiple states I've moved], so for a long time it's been on my radar.*"

How participation impacted participants

Influence on Eating Habits

Of the six participants that spoke about how their participation with the farm influenced their eating and cooking habits, if at all, four gave an explicit declaration that it had impacted their eating habits in some way (N=4). Overall, five out of the six subjects who spoke to this indicated some degree of change (N=5), though one said that their habits had not changed (N=1) with their farm participation. Within those who did say that they had experienced a change in their eating habits, the most frequent way mentioned was by an increase in purchasing from the farm (N=3).

For example, one participant said that "*I will definitely go out of my way to purchase from [the farm]*," while another echoed that sentiment saying, "*The thing is for me, if it's available [at the farm], I don't buy it at the grocery store. I don't care if it costs two or three times as much.*"

Influence on Feelings of Self

All interview participants made note of how their participation at Greater Boston Organics Farm had some sort of impact on their feelings of themselves, though those feelings

varied. The most common impact on their feelings of self was simply feeling "good" or "proud" after participating in activities at the farm, with four participants indicating this (N=4). Other responses varied equally between a feeling of understanding the value of supporting a local business (N=2), gratefulness that the farm was in the community and able to be used (N=2), and an overall improved mood following being outdoors (N=2).

For instance, one participant who shared a number of these sentiments said,

"I usually feel really happy when I'm there and when I'm done with what I'm doing there. Just, I feel good… and it's not because I feel good like, 'oh I volunteer, I did my volunteering,' it's just because it's a beautiful place and I feel good that it's there and didn't get absorbed by apartment buildings."

Another echoed this by saying,

"I do, I did feel good to be at [Greater Boston Organics] Farm, it did, it makes me feel good to participate in an operation like that and to support an operation like [Greater Boston Organics] Farm."

Influence on Community Relationships

One main aspect of Greater Boston Organics Farm's mission statement is "to build broad community"(Mission n.d.).To evaluate whether or not the farm was accomplishing this, I asked interview participants how their participation at the farm had influenced their relationship within the community, having "community" broadly defined to mean the Greater Boston Organics specific community, or even the community of the town as a whole. Of the six participants that answered the question, three said their relationships had not changed significantly (N=3), while two participants said they had met "a few" people (N=2), and one participant said that their relationships had changed significantly and had met many people (N=1), saying

"*...It's been one of the few ways I've met people in the community and made friends as an adult… I've met some pretty cool people that way*."

By comparison, one participant indicated only slightly impacted community relationships,

"*I definitely got to know some people through there better. Maybe not a huge amount, but some people."*

Impressions of the Farm

Impressions of the Mission

I asked three questions related to Greater Boston Organics' mission statement, including a general question regarding how they felt the farm upholds its mission, if there was any aspect that the farm could work more on, and what aspect they thought was done most effectively. This was done in order to gain a sense of how their activity participants felt they were upholding those stated goals.

Five general farm activity participants said that they felt that the farm did a "good job" upholding their mission (N=5). For example,

"I know that they have a lot of programs that I haven't participated in as much as I'd like, but I think that they are really welcoming, and even just having people be able to come to the farm to see what's going on a regular basis and opening it up to, like having educational programs, and letting people do events there, and I think that they're doing a great job trying to do that with the resources they have."

One participant said that they felt they were just doing an "okay" job (N=1). One did not give a value, but rather said they thought the farm might have "too many aspects" to their mission (N=1). They elaborated on this by wondering why the farm did not just choose a few

main goals in order to ensure that all of them were done to the best of their ability, rather than a larger amount where none of them achieved their full potential.

"I'm actually kind of surprised because if I was gonna write a mission statement I'd probably keep it to 3 things and do them well."

This is different from the answers that Greater Boston Organics Farm staff provided. Speaking with the staff, three of them (N=3) emphasized how frequently staff and board members reflect upon the mission in order to ensure that programming fits the stated goals, and to make sure that they are able to adjust it to fit the needs of the farm as it changes over time. Two (N=2) openly stated that they believed the farm has done well upholding its mission, as evidenced by the following quote from one staff:

"We've had so many conversations about it, and it's changed since I've been here, and I was part of that mission rewriting session and all of us, ya know the mission becomes huge and we have to pair it down, and then it's like "does it reflect it?" but overall I think we do a really great job of upholding the mission and kind of the core values of what we are."

Areas of Best Practice within the Mission

Responses were varied in regards to what aspects of their mission activity participants felt Greater Boston Organics did particular well in. One participant gave them kudos for being "forward thinking" (N=1), while another participant said how welcoming they are (N=1), and another mentioned their open programming (N=1). Two participants said that they did well with the point of land stewardship within their mission statement (N=2). Another two mentioned education as their strongest aspect (N=2), while one mentioned their community outreach (N=1).

All of these answers were summed up within one participant's response that the farm does "everything" well (N=1).

On asking staff what they thought the farm did especially well, three staff participants responded. Two (N=2) noted the community aspect of their mission as the strongest, while another (N=1) said their education programs. These responses echoed the sentiment that three activity participants shared when answering the question as well.

Places for Improvement within the Mission

When asked if there were any parts of the mission statement that activity participants felt Greater Boston Organics could improve upon, there were a variety of answers, ranging from farming practices to programming. The most popular response regarded a hope for more opportunities for participation, both in-person volunteering and particularly online given the COVID-19 pandemic (N=3). One participant said,

> *"If things were to continue and had to continue for some amount of time, I would like to see them engaging in more online kinds of things: online education- I don't know what they're doing with some of the local schools, that's also an opportunity for families to get involved."*

Similarly, one participant wished for a broader education curriculum (N=1). Meanwhile, two said that certain farming practices could use improvement (N=2). Two participants also mentioned aspects of increasing accessibility to less advantaged populations (N=2), while one hoped for more handicap accessibility (N=1).

> *"It seems they embrace all [aspects of the mission] but the question would be accessibility and affordability… great you can go on a Sunday and not pay a fee*

and walk around… if you're someone who doesn't have a car… or physically challenged… I don't know how easy it would be to navigate there."

When posed to staff members, I found minimal to no overlap between staff and activity participant responses to this question. Three staff interview participants mentioned that there were certain aspects that could be improved upon, one even going so far as to say that "everything" could be worked on to some extent (N=1). One interviewee said they thought it could be written more clearly (N=1), while two made note of how it can be difficult to make effective change with the large number of voices they have on the staff and board contributing to decisions (N=2).

Impression of Farm Accessibility

Lastly, I examine how Greater Boston Organics Farm activity participants viewed the farm's general accessibility, i.e., any physical or other unseen barriers to entry. All seven activity participants answered this question. Two individuals simply said that they thought the farm was readily accessible (N=2), while three other participants elaborated by responding that they believed the farm to be accessible because of the times that it was open for people to come (N=3).

"Yeah, I mean I think it's open for one thing from dawn to dusk… . So it's accessible, but I don't know how they could do a better job getting people out there."

Another said that the option to wander the land for free made it accessible to anyone (N=1):

"I think it absolutely is because there's no admission fee and you can just go and wander around the farm. They're very open, they're very accessible."

Some activity participants also made note of aspects of the farm that they felt might be hindrances for certain populations. The most common way was in terms of physical disability, mentioning that those visiting with different physical abilities might have a difficult time (N=3), with one stating,

"I think they need to do a little bit more to be handicap accessible. I don't think they're very handicap friendly."

Other barriers that were mentioned were the farm's location in the Greater Boston area (N=2), the prices of farm products (N=2), and how the farm itself and its overall culture and atmosphere might be unappealing to certain populations (N=2),

"...like I said, the local people around WL tend to be pretty much white and privileged so I'm not sure that they are um, I don't know how well they get the word out, or how appealing it would be to people who are less like that,"

which is consistent with previous studies in regards to how farms, when embodying white values, tend to dissuade people of color from accessing them.

Again, similar to the farm activity participants, I asked staff members (N=4) how accessible they felt the farm was. All of the staff respondents made sure to note that there were aspects of the farm that made it accessible, while other aspects could pose barriers for certain people. Like activity participants mentioned, the times that the farm is open to the public was mentioned as making it accessible by two staff members (N=2), while two also noted the free programming options available (N=2), and another two made note of discount rates available on some programs and produce (N=2):

"a few years ago we started a scholarship program, and in the farm stand, and Farm to Go we've introduced the SNAP program, and now tiered pricing,

which we're actually gonna do across the board, so we'll be doing that with CSA, with events, so, just trying to make it more accessible."

As far as ways that the farm had barriers to entry, staff members noted the farm's physical location being distant from public transportation stops (N=3):

"there are barriers. One of them is our location, we're not close to public transportation- a T stop of anything like that, so you pretty much need a car to get out here, we're not really within walking distance from a lot of places,"

which is similar to the two activity participants who mentioned this aspect. The hours that their education programs are open was also mentioned (N=1); as many working parents look for full-time childcare, Greater Boston Organics' half-day programming would be difficult for some people to access:

"for years we've had access to funds for kids to have scholarships to programs, and we've never successfully used the money. Part of the reason is that most of our programs are Half-Day programs, and parents who are looking for discounted programs need full day care."

Additionally, one staff member mentioned the difficulty of pricing produce at prices low-income populations could afford while still meeting the organization's bottom line (N=1). This response is similar to the two activity participants who noted high prices as obstacles for some. Another staff member mentioned the hope of creating a more accessible garden space for those with different abilities (N=1), which is something that is lacking right now and indicates that the farm is not completely accessible to those with physical disabilities, as three farm activity participants noted as well.

Discussion

At the outset of this study I aimed to discover how this farm fit into the overall narrative surrounding community and urban agriculture, in addition to the variety of motivations that participants had for initially joining the farm, and the impacts resulting from their involvement. Through semi-structured interviews with 11 participants from a community farm in a greater Boston area suburb, I discovered themes relating to motivation for participation, eating habits, feelings of self, relationship with community members and thoughts on the farm's accessibility and mission accomplishment. Below I discuss my key findings in turn.

First, the demographics of interview participants fit both the demographics of the area in which the farm is located, as well as previous studies on those participating in UA and community agriculture projects (Carfagna et al. 2014; Draper & Freedman 2010). Specifically, my interview participants were majority female (six out of seven), 100% White, and 100% having achieved at least a Bachelor's Degree, which is significantly more than the United States population as a whole, in which 39% obtained Bachelor's Degrees in 2019 (Educational Attainment 2020). These participants are also in line demographically with those who have been found most likely to subscribe to the concept of eco-habitus, as all participants mentioned the aim of being conscious consumers or trying to support and eat locally (Carfagna et al. 2014; Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019). Additionally, these findings signal an alignment with previous literature that has noted how UA projects are increasingly a source of community for White, economically, and food secure population (Bernard-Carreño 2015; Broad 2016; Hoover 2013).

Second, in terms of motivations, participants noted the following as being main factors in their decision to join the farm: proximity from home to farm, prior interest in the subjects offered at the farm, healthy eating habits, desire to keep the land from development. This finding is in

line with what previous studies have found as frequent motivations for community agriculture project participation (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010). Specifically, the most common motivations for joining were proximity and prior interest in subjects. Therefore, it appears that convenience and practicality seem to be the driving force of community agriculture project participation for most people, and environmental consciousness plays a relatively smaller role.

Third, when it comes to impacts of farm participation, five participants said that their involvement in farm activities shaped their eating habits. This finding is consistent with previous research which has noted the potential that UA holds for improving, or otherwise changing participants' eating habits (Alaimo et al. 2008; Armstrong 2000; Classens 2015; Draper & Freedman 2010). The most common way that respondents noted their eating habits changing was through increased purchasing from the farm, noting a choice to go out of their way to purchase from Greater Boston Organics even when other options were available. As a number of studies have previously found, those who participate in community agriculture projects have an increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables (Alaimo et al. 2008; Armstrong 2000; Classens 2015; Draper & Freedman 2010). Taken in combination with participants demographics, this finding also aligns with the embodiment of eco-habitus, as evidenced by participants' purchasing of local foods despite other options (Carfagna et al. 2014; Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019).

As far as the participants' feelings of self, seven reported feeling some difference from their involvement at the farm. Four reported feeling either "good" or "proud" after participating in farm events, two noted understanding the value of supporting the local farm, two were grateful for the opportunity to participate, and two simply noted a generally improved mood after being

outside at the farm. Participants' feeling a generally improved mood following their time at the farm is congruent with previous studies that have found how people are generally happier after being in green, outdoor spaces (Carrus et al. 2015; Finlay et al. 2015; Gilbert 2016; White et al. 2013; Williams 2017) which the farm clearly provides. Additionally, the participants that noted appreciating the value of supporting the local farm align with the views present in those found to have high eco-habitus, as scholars have found that eco-habitus has been employed by individuals through a preference for local businesses, products, and food (Carfagna et al. 2014; Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019).

Of the six participants who spoke about the impact that their involvement in the farm had on their community relationships, half of them said their relationships had not changed. Meanwhile, two said that they had met a few people, and one said they met numerous people. This is in contrast to the literature that has noted the potential that UA has for fostering and building community, as the majority discovered no notable changes in their community relationships (Angotti 2015; McIvor and Hale 2015).

Previous literature has also made note of the potential that UA projects have for acting as public spaces in addition to their role as places for agriculture. My case of the Greater Boston Organics Farm fits well within this narrative. Literature has noted that the projects that successfully take this role of a public space are characterized by social programming opportunities, strong neighborhood connection, and accessible perimeters (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010; Napawan 2015). Greater Boston Organics successfully accomplishes two of these aspects, as they have open perimeters for people to walk and hike, and a wide variety of social programming opportunities. As discussed above though, the farm does not play

a particularly strong role in fostering community relationships, which is in contrast to what some previous literature has found.

There was an overall consensus among farm activity participants and farm staff that Greater Boston Organics Farm does a generally good or "okay" job upholding their mission statement, with six of the seven activity participants indicating as much, and two of the three staff members saying as much. This is indicative that the way that staff members emphasized the importance of reflecting on how the farm's mission relates to any new programs or additions has an overall positive effect on ensuring that the farm continues to uphold its goals.

As for the areas of best practice that the farm provides, the education and community outreach aspects that both a number of activity participants and staff members noted as being particularly strong, fall in line with the previous literature that notes the potential that UA and community agriculture holds for community building. Greater Boston Organics Farm social and education programming echo the findings of a number of studies that note how the integration of these types of programs have the potential to increase community involvement and increase positive attitudes toward the community at large (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010).

These responses do seem to contradict some of the answers given by farm activity participants who noted room for improvement in the farm's amount of programming opportunities online and in-person, as well as the scope of education curriculum. In addition to those lamentations though were a number of wishes regarding increasing accessibility to those with different physical abilities as well as those from less advantaged populations. These hopes for the farm could indicate what previous literature has noted as being increasingly common issues among UA, as local food often becomes a commodity through the use of market-based

neoliberal economic solutions to the issue of food justice (Bernard-Carreño 2015; Kennedy & Johnston 2019; Mares and Alkon 2011).

That point also tied into both activity participants' and staff members' responses to the question of how they viewed the farm's accessibility. Two activity participants noted that high prices for products and the culture and atmosphere of the farm itself likely posed obstacles some populations might face to accessing the farm. This note of the culture the farm produces is consistent with the literature that has cited how many food alternative initiatives benefit White, economically advantaged communities (Broad 2016; Hoover 2013), and that through language and even food variety, UA projects reproduce Whiteness and White values, which could thus lead to a lack of interest from communities of color (Guthman 2008).

Additionally, the physical location of the farm being far from any sort of public transportation was mentioned as a barrier both by activity participants and staff members, and would automatically exclude anyone without their own form of transportation. That, taken in combination with the admission of high product prices, and half-day child programs acts as exclusionary factors for lower socioeconomic status populations.

This research does hold some limitations. For one, the sample size was fairly small and thus findings should not be used to generalize to all of those who partake in community and urban agriculture projects. Similarly, the themes identified are not exhaustive and are simply representative of those I interviewed. Different patterns may well emerge at farms in areas with different demographics. Future research is needed to examine the social dynamics and processes around farm participation in different social contexts. Additionally, participants who responded to my advertisement may have a particularly strong interest in farm-related issues, which may have driven some of the findings.

Conclusion

This research sought to discover three things: 1) how a particular farm fit into the narrative of community and urban agriculture projects, 2) the diverse motivations participants had for joining the farm, and 3) the impacts that involvement with the farm had on participants. Findings from my sample revealed a variety of ways in which this farm is similar to other UA and community agriculture projects. For instance, the majority of my sample were White women with at least a Bachelor's Degree, all of whom mentioned working to be conscious consumers or purchase locally produced food and products, thus aligning themselves with the concept of eco-habitus (Carfagna et al. 2014; Kennedy & Givens 2019; Kennedy & Johnston 2019). Additionally, the ways in which participants noted high prices, physical location of the farm away from public transportation, and an overall culture as barriers to entry for certain populations, fits within previous findings showing similar difficulties at other UA projects (Broad 2016; Guthman 2008; Hoover 2013; Mares & Alkon 2011). Finally, my case also presented itself in alignment with previous research stating the potential for UA to work as public spaces through their open perimeter and social programming (Armstrong 2000; Draper & Freedman 2010; Napawan 2015).I was also able to identify main motivation themes for why participants initially decided to take an active role at Greater Boston Organics. The most frequently noted were proximity and prior interests. The participants also noted how their participation has had an impact on a variety of aspects of their lives, including their eating habits, and feelings about themselves, though very few had found a significant impact on their community relationships.

Combined, these findings provide a path for future directions that the farm could move to combat the negative side effects that the literature has shown for UA, as well as for future

research to perhaps examine the interplay between motivations for joining these projects and what the outcomes are for those who participate.

Appendix

<u>Open-Ended Interview Guide for Farmer Activity Participants:</u>

- How did you find out about the farm?
- What types of activities or events do you participate in with the farm?
- What made you decide to take on an active role in participating at farm-led events?
- How has COVID affected your participation w/ farm?
- Were you aware of, or had participated in, the gardening or farming processes prior to your engagement here?
- How has your participation with the farm influenced your eating and cooking habits?
    - How has COVID influenced your eating and cooking habits?
- Do you have children?
    - If so, do you bring them to participate in farm activities? Why or why not?
    - If not, would your participation in farm events have any influence on how you would raise them, in terms of eating habits, outdoor activities, and the like?
- Has your participation with the farm had an influence on your personal feelings about yourself? For example, changes in your confidence levels, or feelings of self sufficiency, or levels positivity?
- Has your participation with the farm had any influence on your political participation?
- How has your participation with the farm influenced your relationships with other community members?
- Do you feel that the farm is accessible to anyone?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel that the farm upholds its stated mission and goals?
    - ["The [Greater Boston Organics Farm] builds broad community and seeks to model sustainable practices through active learning, organic agriculture, land stewardship, and an appreciation of our historic New England farm."]
    - ["Our vision is to develop our farming operations, educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and community events to provide increased value for all to enjoy."]

- Is there anything that you think the farm could improve on, whether a part of their mission already, or something you think that it could add?
- Is there any part of the mission or goals that you think that farm does especially well?

Open-Ended Interview Guide for Farm Staff:

- How long have you been with the farm?
- What drew you to work here?
- Would you say that most of the volunteers and staff here are from around the nearby/surrounding area?
- How has COVID influenced farm operations?
    - Do you think that these changes will affect the direction that the farm hopes to move in the future in terms of mission and goals?
- Where does the food that the farm produces go? For example, is most of it sold at farmers markets, CSA membership boxes, donated to food pantries?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel that the farm upholds its stated mission and goals?
- Is there any part of that mission that you think the farm could work more on?
- Is there any part of the mission or goals that you think that farm does especially well?
- Do you think that the farm and its events are accessible to anyone?
- Has the recent political climate here in the U.S. had any affect on farm operations or the direction that the farm or hopes to move/operate in the future?
    - How?

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