Eating Exclusion: Social Barriers at Farmers Markets

Explications, Potential Solutions, and Case Studies

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Abstract

Inspired by a grandmother's childhood memory of the inclusive nature of the 17th Street Farmers Market in Richmond, Virginia, this paper will begin by examining the historical origins of farmers markets as a place for consumers of various socioeconomic statuses before World War Two. Though farmers markets mostly disappeared in the mid-20th century due to urban sprawl and government regulations that favored industrial agriculture, they resurged in the 1970s with the goal of increasing food access in low-income populations. However, farmers markets quickly became a trend primarily popular among the upper class white, effectively shutting out food-insecure populations who lacked access to fresh produce and other healthy foods. Though farmers markets often provide a viable solution to so-called food deserts, they are plagued by an aura of affluence and whiteness that discourages participation by people of other races and income levels. While there exist numerous structural and practical barriers, this paper will focus on the social norms that prevent people of low-income and minority status from visiting farmers markets. It will detail the reasons for the creation of the culture of whiteness and affluence as well as ways to make the farmers market environment more inclusive once again. These reasons include urban sprawl and the rise of industrial agriculture, ignorance of the racial past and present of agriculture, and the importance of the counter-cultural ideology over the goal of eliminating food deserts. Potential solutions include representing more minorities as vendors, locating markets in neighborhoods of various income levels, catering to the cultural preferences of minorities in the market's product mix, and increasing minority and low-income participation in organizational boards. In addition, this paper will compare two farmers markets in Virginia that have both eliminated barriers such as transportation and cost but that differ in their success at dissipating the typical upper class white ambience of farmers markets. The La Plaza Latino Market in Richmond has successfully broken down the social barriers described above to attract the food-insecure, while the Charlottesville City Market has failed in attracting a racially and socioeconomically diverse population.

History of Farmers Markets in the United States

Eighty-five year old Love Velitjelos recalled childhood memories of visiting the 17th Street Farmers Market in Richmond, Virginia. As a resident of the downtown area in which the market stands, she spoke about its inclusive nature in the early years of the Great Depression. "It was the place to be," she remembered, and she came across people from all walks of life, because most everyone lived downtown in the heart of the city. The market was always abuzz with business and overflowing with purveyors of meats, vegetables, and fish. One of seven children born to Greek immigrant parents, Love belonged to a poor family, but they still visited the market each week to purchase the few groceries they could afford.[1] In fact, the 17th Street Farmers Market proves one of the country's oldest farmers markets. It began as a public gathering space in 1737. In its early days it boomed with success due to its proximity to the James River, which allowed fishermen to sell daily catches of shellfish to their customers, and its location on the main road that linked Richmond and Williamsburg. In the 19th century, the 17th Street Farmers Market became a space for religious meetings, political rallies, and thriving commerce.[2]

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[1] Love Velitjelos, interview with author, Richmond, Virginia, November 10, 2013.
[2] "Farmers Market History," City of Richmond, accessed December 2, 2013, http://www.richmondgov.com/FarmersMarket/History.aspx.

The history of the 17th Street Farmers Market in Richmond mirrors that of most farmers markets in the United States before World War Two. Farmers often sold their excess produce to city-dwellers through direct marketing channels. They created rudimentary markets by lining up on main thoroughfares as early as the 17th century. In the early 1900s, full-fledged farmers markets often coincided with seasonal celebrations and fairs, offering farmers a venue to exhibit their produce and livestock to families. By the 1940s, each state in the country laid claim to at least one farmers market. Even if they lacked bricks-and-mortar establishments, farmers would congregate in an empty lot and sell produce directly from their trucks.[3] Across the country, markets composed a primary source of farmers' income up until World War Two.[4]

However, the 1950s-era construction of the interstate highway system marked the genesis of urban sprawl, which would engender land use and transportation policies that dissipated urban communities in favor of new suburbs. Farmers markets disappeared as urban town squares diminished in prominence and shopping centers followed families to the suburbs. Furthermore, government regulations in the 1950s and 1960s thwarted farmers' attempts to sell directly to consumers. Policies required standardization of the size, quality, and packaging of fresh produce. Small farmers lacked the infrastructure necessary to comply with the "pack and grade" standards, and the rules vastly diminished the ability of farmers to sell directly to consumers at any possible remaining markets.[5] Industrial agriculture quickly overtook more traditional farmer-to-consumer marketing channels.

Nonetheless, the 1960s and 1970s ushered in a resurgence of farmers markets, beginning in California and spreading across the country. The lackluster quality of the produce imported from around the world in an increasingly globalized food system once more opened opportunities for direct farmer-to-consumer marketing. The organics movement and the counter-cultural ideology that embraced the small farmer gained steam and created new demand for farmer-to-consumer markets. Government policies that sought to ease direct marketing restrictions soon followed. Congress passed the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act in 1976, which legislated that an unenthusiastic United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) support the development of roadside stands, pick-your-own farms, and farmers markets.[6]

In the early days of the farmers' market renaissance, food justice advocates established markets specifically with the goal of increasing access to produce of high caliber and affordable price in underserved communities.[7] They recognized that farmers markets offered an opportunity to address the dearth of produce in food deserts, or primarily low-income areas that lack access to healthful foods such as fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins. Grocery stores often shy away from low-income neighborhoods, so residents in food deserts must shop at corner convenience stores loaded with highly processed, calorically dense, low-nutrient foods. During the growing season, locally grown produce often proves cost price-competitive with grocery stores and definitely less expensive than corner stores, which rarely offer fresh produce at all. Families who shop at farmers markets can purchase fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins that will allow them to cook healthier meals at a lower cost than eating out,[8] even at the cheap fast food restaurants that proliferate in food deserts. Pioneering groups such as the Interfaith Hunger Coalition and The

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[3] Marisol Dayton, "History of Farmers Markets in the U.S.," last modified February 5, 2010, http://www.culinaryarts360.com/index.php/history-of-farmers-markets-in-us-13357/.
[4] Robert Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 255.
[5] Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound*, 255.
[6] Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound*, 256.
[7] Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 165.
[8] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 166.

Food Trust created markets in Los Angeles,[9] and other anti-hunger organizations such as the Nutritional Development Services of the Archdiocese in Philadelphia opened their own farmers markets across the country in the late 1970s.[10]

Explications for an Aura of Affluence and Whiteness

Though the return of farmers markets brought auspicious possibilities for the food justice movement, by the mid 1980s their "locations, demographics, and reputations had begun to change," as Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi note.[11] By the late 1990s, the average household income of farmers market patrons ranged from $40,000 to $65,000, according to the USDA,[12] clearly not a low-income demographic. Today minorities, especially African Americans, do not participate in farmers markets at a level proportionate to the population.[13] While there exists considerable overlap between minority and low-income populations, race cannot and should not serve as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Indeed, much of the minority population falls into high-income brackets, while a significant number of white citizens are poor. Though race and class must not be conflated, farmers markets have shifted from serving middle- and low-income populations with a variety of races and ethnicities to a primarily affluent white demographic. A number of factors have contributed to this transformation.

The recently reborn farmer-to-consumer movement developed and grew in popularity, and demand for farmers' markets followed. Markets became an increasingly important stream of income for farmers, providing 50 percent or more of their revenues. However, the urban sprawl that had begun in the 1950s continued and picked up speed in the 1970s and 1980s, threatening the remaining small local farmers that relied so heavily on markets. Farmers then had to focus their efforts on markets where they could fetch a high premium for their products,[14] shifting the focus away from the original goal of using farmers markets to increase food access for vulnerable populations.[15] The economic need to focus on profits rather than addressing food insecurity created a chasm between successful markets that served higher-income populations and fledgling markets that served low-income populations. Farmers flocked toward the more successful markets, initiating a cycle that eventually left markets in low-income neighborhoods unviable. These markets saw fewer farmers and a smaller selection of products, which led to less consumer patronage. The remaining farmers then gained even less income from these markets and stopped vending, at which point the cycle began again. Fewer farmers meant less selection and less income from shoppers, leading to the demise of virtually all markets in low-income neighborhoods. [16]

Indeed, the primarily affluent white customers who could then afford to support small farmers at farmers markets assumed what Alison Alkon deems a "complimentary community imaginary," in which they justified the cost barriers that kept low-income groups from the markets by considering themselves morally valiant champions of the small family farmers in

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[9] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 165.

[10] Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound*, 256.
[11] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 165.
[12] Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound*, 257.
[13] Julie Guthman, "'If They Only Knew:' The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food," ed. Alison Hope Alkon (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 265.
[14] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 165.
[15] Andy Fisher, "Hot Peppers and Parking Lot Peaches: Evaluating Farmers' Markets in Low Income Communities" (report presented to the Community Food Security Coalition, Venice, California, January 1999), 16.
[16] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 165.

their community.[17] In sum, the need for farmers to gather premium prices from affluent customers led to difficulty in establishing markets in low-income neighborhoods. The subsequent moral high ground that the remaining customers assumed as they supported their local farmers built upon the stereotype of farmers markets as elitist and upper-class.[18]

The stereotype of markets as a place for the upper class grew more engrained. The perception of higher prices and the idea of the farmers market as a niche experience meant that the goal of establishing farmers markets in underserved areas became ignored.[19] Even today, most farmers markets attract primarily white, affluent people, while minorities and low-income populations remain underrepresented. Indeed, because farmers markets are often located in "high-end" areas, relatively few can be found in minority communities, especially neighborhoods with a high concentration of African Americans. The markets that do manage to sprout in African-American neighborhoods are exceptionally smaller than average.[20]

Even when farmers markets are located in neighborhoods that house a variety of races and income levels, the customer base of farmers markets proves disproportionately white.[21] The physical clustering of white bodies discourages non-whites from participating in farmers markets and hinders the ability of farmers markets to address inequity in food access.[22] The gathering of white bodies around areas of affluence and privilege code these spaces as white, "racialize" the space, and discourage others from attending. According to Alkon, such whiteness persists in the minds of people of all races not as an explicitly racial quality, but as a marker of "American" or "normal" characteristics,[23] relegating those who do not share those characteristics as "other" or "abnormal." This phenomenon occurs even as proponents of farmers markets commend them as a culturally and racially neutral space in an attempt to avoid seeming racist,[24] conscious as they are of the overwhelming whiteness of the practice. In this way, white farmers market advocates reveal their tendency towards colorblindness, or the assertion that practices such as farmers markets are neutral on the issue of race and do not seek to attract or exclude any one race over the other. In fact, Julie Guthman found direct evidence of colorblindness when she interviewed several white vendors and managers of farmers markets. When asked about attempts to increase diversity and the market, most embraced language of neutrality and attempts at anti-racism. Many echoed sentiments that targeting minorities or low-income populations would show prejudice and that farmers markets should be spaces for all that do not attempt to attract those of a certain race.[25]

However, no place or practice can be entirely devoid of racial characteristics. Both the physical overrepresentation of white shoppers at farmers markets and participants' tendency toward colorblindness ignores the racial disparity of markets. Colorblindness most evidently manifests in the ignorance of the racial past and present of agriculture (267).[26] Primarily white farmers market participants tend to romanticize agriculture from a white perspective and ignore the realities that people of color face in agriculture, both historically and today. In the past, only

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[17] Alison Hope Alkin and Christie Grace McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets: Constructions, Perpetuations, Contestations?" *Antipode* 43: 4 (2011): 939.
[18] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 165.
[19] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 166.
[20] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 269.
[21] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 269.
[22] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 938.
[23] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 940.
[24] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 269.
[25] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 270.

[26] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 267.

whites could fulfill the ideal of small-scale sustainable farmer that today's supporters of local agriculture uphold, while other races were marginalized in agricultural processes. As white settlers colonized America, Native Americans were forcefully displaced from their land, mistreated, and prevented from cultivating the food on which they subsisted.[27] When Chinese and Japanese immigrants entered the country, they were excluded from land ownership as whites acquired land virtually for free,[28] and underpaid Asian immigrants held the dirtiest jobs inside California's first factory farms.[29] In addition, Nazi conspirators favored organic farming methods in the World War Two era. During Hitler's regime, organic soil conjured notions of national vigor, purity, and home soil. The word "organic" has not completely washed clean of those connotations,[30] potentially alienating Jews from the farmers markets that espouse organic produce. Many people ignore the contributions of the vast Latino labor force that carries out much of the backbreaking work on American farms today.[31] Interestingly, when Latino farmers do sell at farmers markets, patrons often assume that they are not "real" farmers and that they have purchased their produce wholesale, intending to furtively resell it as their own.[32]

However, the strongest resistance to the whitewashed ideal of agriculture comes from African Americans who were oppressed for decades by white slaveholders. The desire of sustainable agriculture advocates to "get their hands dirty" by working in the garden or small farm does not resonate with black people, who associate such proclamations with working as slaves for white masters.[33] Indeed, the very phrase tends to invoke images of slave labor and injustice at the hands of slaveholders, not nostalgia.[34] In addition, white adulation of agricultural work ignores African Americans' long post-slavery struggle to become fully integrated into the country's modernity and progress,[35] as many became tenant farmers after the Civil War and all struggled to gain full civil rights for decades after. Today, some farmers markets themselves reflect racialized histories. The 17th Street Farmers Market in Richmond, Virginia flourished throughout the 1800s as a vibrant slave-trading network.[36] During the Civil War, it served as a meeting space for Confederate soldiers.[37] Other historical farmers markets that thrived in the antebellum era most likely relied on slave commerce, though the passage of time has buried such realities from the minds of most patrons. In sum, people of color do not resonate with the call to support their local farmer because they realize the struggles that non-whites faced in the past and still confront today in growing food.[38]

In addition to the clustering of physical whiteness at farmers markets and the coded space that results, whiteness and affluence became closely associated with farmers markets when the counter-cultural ideology that praised small farmers over the industrial food system took precedence over the original goal of markets to eliminate food deserts.[39] The counter-culture of

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[27] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 945.
[28] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 273.
[29] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 945.
[30] Julie Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice," *Cultural Geographies* 15: 431 (2008): 435.
[31] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 945.
[32] Kyle Gardiner, interview with author, Charlottesville, Virginia, December 8, 2013.
[33] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 273.
[34] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 276.
[35] Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others," 436.
[36] Drew Pautenade, "17th Street: First Market Square," last modified April 19, 2011, http://urmappingamericanhistory.wordpress.com/2011/04/20/17th-streetone-of-americas-first-public-markets/.
[37] "Farmers Market History."

[38] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 945.
[39] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 944.

the 1960s and 1970s bore a counter-cuisine that touted the benefits of unprocessed food,[40] which proved too expensive for the country's poorest to acquire. At the same time, the focus on organic, fresh food and the dichotomy of access between people of different income levels meant that where one went to eat and what one ate there became important indicators of class.[41] These class differences played out not only in ingredient-focused, farm-to-table restaurants, but in farmers markets as well. In addition, the back-to-the-farm movements and agricultural communes that cropped up among the 1960s counter-culture remained primarily white activities.[42] These practices hailed the production of organic and sustainable produce, the very foundation upon which modern farmers markets are predicated. The historical affluent whiteness of the counter-cultural food movement has left a footprint that contributes to the exclusion of minorities and low-income populations from farmers markets today.

The association of farmers markets with the Slow Food movement also speaks to their reputation of spaces for affluent white people.[43] Slow Food, an organization created by European whites, seeks to counteract a conventional food system that prizes cost, efficiency, and convenience over quality. Its Italian origins and mostly white membership carries an obvious racial denotation that can discourage non-whites from involvement. Its call to pay the full cost of one's food and savor one's meals ignores some of the realities that low-income people face, as they often find themselves forced to acquire low-cost, quick food from the industrial food system. In fact, the urban poor already spend a greater amount of their income on food than the middle class. The idea that people should pay more for higher-quality food, supported by Slow Food as well as other farmers market advocates, excludes those who make food choices based solely on need.[44]

Primarily white farmers market advocates and others that subscribe to the Slow Food worldview assume that their food-related values reign morally superior and that their values should be held universally,[45] regardless of an individual's personal experiences or struggles. They often assume that those who do not frequent farmers markets stay away solely because they have different, and inferior, food-related values. In fact, Guthman found that farmers market vendors attributed the lack of diversity in race and income levels to a difference in personal tastes, characteristics, and values, rather than issues of cost or access. They assumed that those who shop at farmers markets are better educated, more concerned about the quality of their food and health, and more interested in the political aspect of supporting local farmers. One even directly attributed such differences to race, suggesting that Hispanics as a whole simply do not like fresh, local, organic produce.[46] When market participants assume that those who do not shop at farmers markets do not share their morally superior, universal food-related values, they relegate those who do not or cannot shop at farmers markets into a separate category of "others." This fosters an idea about the "moral inferiority of the poor," in which farmers market advocates cast those who do not shop at farmers markets aside as a morally subordinate group of people.[47]

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[40] Julie Guthman, "Fast Food/Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of 'Yuppie Chow,'" ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2013), 504.
[41] Julie Guthman, "Fast Food/Organic Food: Reflexive Tastes and the Making of 'Yuppie Chow,'" ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2013), 503.
[42] Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others," 435.
[43] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 949.
[44] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 950.
[45] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 267.
[46] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 270.
[47] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 950.

Perceptions of differing degrees of food-related morality make farmers market advocates even less likely to support the need to access healthy food.

Potential Solutions to Increase Patronage by Food-Insecure Populations

Despite the deep-rooted causes of the ambience of affluent whiteness at farmers' markets, there exist various solutions that managers and vendors can enact to attract the food-insecure. For one, organizers can locate their farmers markets where people of a variety of income levels have access. Locating markets in an area that serves both high- and low-income neighborhoods can help balance the tradeoff between farmers' need for profits and low-income populations' need for fresh produce. For example, a "bridge market" in Pico, California remains operable by serving multiple consumer demographics.[48] In such markets, customers with more disposable income can afford value-added products such as bread and jam. These products bring greater returns to vendors, so they can afford to sell produce to customers with lower incomes at accessible prices. The Waverly Farmers Market in Baltimore, Maryland found success by locating near neighborhoods that house middle-income African Americans, low-income Koreans, affluent residents, and Johns Hopkins University students. It offers both lower-priced basic goods such as fresh fruits and vegetables as well as value-added products like goat cheese and artisan breads.[49]

Once farmers' markets have located in an area accessible to minority and low-income populations, they can increase patronage by catering to the cultural preferences of minorities in their product mix. Offering culturally appropriate produce can give minority groups incentive to shop at the market. For example, the Richmond Certified Farmers Market in California attracted Asian customers through its selection of Asian vegetables and fish. It also offered items such as black-eyed peas, which many African Americans who had migrated from the South could not find anywhere else.[50]

Indeed, extending access to produce by catering to the preferences of minority and low-income shoppers may require some controversial shifts that stray from the typical counter-cultural intention of farmers markets to provide organic, locally grown food. Because the growing methods used to cultivate organic produce often result in higher prices than conventional produce, low-income customers sometimes cannot or do not wish to furnish the extra funds. In order to attract low-income populations, it may prove necessary to include vendors that farm using conventional methods.[51] In addition, most farmers markets prohibit the resale of produce purchased from the grocery store or warehouse. However, the Waverly Farmers Market provides a convenient option for shoppers by allowing the resale of basic items that are hard to grow in the Baltimore area, such as potatoes, carrots, and onions.[52] The ability to purchase all one's produce in a single trip offers an incentive to shoppers pressed for time and money. Indeed, farmers' market managers must strike a balance between maintaining the dual goals of supporting local, organic farmers and providing healthy food to vulnerable populations.

Beyond offering goods that attract minority populations, markets can counter the appearance of affluent whiteness by representing more minorities as vendors. Markets that serve low-income populations successfully often have a diverse mix of farmers, including Latino and

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[48] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 164.
[49] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 28.
[50] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 19.
[51] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 19.
[52] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 29.

Asian farmers, and an accordingly diverse mix of customers.[53] From a functional standpoint, hiring Latino vendors and workers can break down language barriers that prevent monolingual Spanish-speaking customers from coming to the market.[54] However, representing more minority farmers may more importantly combat the whitewashed, romanticized image of sustainable agriculture that surrounds many markets today. The prevalence of white faces as vendors, despite the fact that people of color do much of the labor even on local farms, reinforces the assumption only whites participate in local, small-scale agriculture.[55] By also heralding and focusing on the efforts of farm workers in addition to farm owners, farmers market participants can recognize the racial realities of farm work.[56] Vendors, farm owners, and farm workers of color can spread alternative agrarian narratives and dismantle the ideal of the white small family farm.

The North Berkeley Farmers Market incorporates vendors of color in a novel way by employing low-income youth of color to sell organic produce, combatting the whitewashed agricultural ideal and showing low-income minorities that organic produce relates to them.[57] Other markets have incorporated minority vendors as part of a broader strategy to establish the market as a space for minority populations. For example, the West Oakland Farmers Market focuses on black farmers as part of an effort to identify the market as a place for African Americans. Also called the Mandela Market, it showcases the few black farmers in California and calls attention to the deficit of African American-owned farms as an issue of racial justice. It also promotes food justice by seeking to offer an alternative to the supermarkets that have abandoned the area. Other markets have self-identified as minority-focused as well. In contrast to the "get your hands dirty" mentality of some farmers market advocates, which ignores the racial past of black participation in agriculture, Mo' Better Foods frames its work as redressing the historical inequities that blacks experienced at the hands of whites who stripped them of their right to own land.[58]

In addition to increasing minority representation in vendors, farmers markets can give low-income and minority populations a sense of ownership by incorporating them in organizational boards. Such inclusion would give these groups a personal stake in the market and allow them to feel that it is their market.[59] Representing minorities in organizational capacities could also engender cultural events that further attract minorities to the market. Holidays that fall around key harvest times offer opportunities for cross-cultural celebrations. For example, Día de los Muertos occurs around peak marigold season, and the Chinese New Year overlaps with mandarin harvest. These festivities offer a key opportunity to attract Mexican and Chinese customers, counteracting the overwhelming whiteness of markets.[60]

Case Studies: La Plaza Latino Market and Charlottesville City Market

Two farmers markets in Virginia have varied in their success in extending access to healthy food to low-income populations in food deserts. Both markets have addressed issues of transportation and cost that often keep vulnerable populations from purchasing food at farmers

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[53] Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 164.
[54] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 20.
[55] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 945.
[56] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 946.
[57] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 952.
[58] Guthman, "'If They Only Knew,'" 274.

[59] Fisher, "Hot Peppers," 40.
[60] Alkin and McCullen, "Whiteness in Farmers Markets," 952.

markets, so they both show vast potential in addressing food insecurity. However, La Plaza Latino Market in Richmond has attracted low-income and minority shoppers, while the Charlottesville City Market has failed to dissipate the affluent whiteness of the typical farmers market.

May 2013 marked the birth of La Plaza Latino Market, a farmers market intentionally located in a low-income, primarily Latino neighborhood in the South Side of Richmond. The Club de Comerciantes de Virginia, a Hispanic merchant's club, created the market specifically to provide access to fresh, healthy foods to the multiple low- and middle-income neighborhoods within walking distance of the market. Because the market provides a geographically accessible option for the food insecure, the creators of the market sought to ensure that they could afford the products offered there. The Club de Comerciantes de Virginia and other private donors furnished a program in which residents on the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, could purchase tokens worth twice the amount of their SNAP benefits to redeem at the market's stands. The SNAP doubling program received $2,000 of funding over the market's inaugural season from May to August.[61]

La Plaza proved unique in the variety of vendors and activities it offered to its shoppers. Indeed, it fulfilled its goal to extend fresh fruits and vegetables to those in need. The market offered both the organic, locally grown produce typical of most farmers markets as well as conventional, traditional produce often used in Latino cooking. Two vendors offered locally grown produce such as watermelons, collard greens, tomatoes, onions, and multiple varieties of squash. Shalom Farms, a nonprofit community farm project that seeks to increase access to fresh produce in inner-city Richmond, sold at the market each week. Their food justice-focused mission enabled them to change the food environment at La Plaza in a variety of ways. Through a youth-run farm stand program, children of color aged nine to fourteen sold produce from Shalom Farms' five-acre organic vegetable farm in Goochland County. The program not only taught youth the commercial knowledge needed to run the stand at the market, but also included a weekly curriculum about sustainable agriculture and healthy eating habits. In addition, the presence of minority youth selling produce at the farmers market piqued shoppers' interest and showed minorities that organic fruits and vegetables could be important to them. Shalom Farms' nonprofit structure allowed for prices low enough for food-insecure customers to afford. However, Shalom Farms kept its prices above those of the other local farm so that shoppers would be encouraged to buy from the latter. The for-profit farm could then remain economically viable at the market in the long-term, which would benefit both the local farmer and the food-insecure consumers.

In addition to locally grown, organic produce at affordable prices, La Plaza offered conventional varieties often used in Latin cooking. Imported from Mexico and resold, such produce may not be permitted at many markets. However, the customers in the Latino neighborhood thoroughly enjoyed the availability of avocadoes, tomatillos, cacti, plantains, and other ethnic fruits and vegetables. The combination of traditional Latino produce and local, organic produce made for a convenient shopping experience. Aside from produce, other options for Latino products abounded at the market. An authentic Mexican restaurant sold tacos from a truck, while another stand sold traditional Mexican shaved-ice drinks. Yet another booth sold Mexican flan-style desserts and coffee drinks, offering consumers a snack while they did their grocery shopping. Finally, vendors purveyed traditional Mexican child's toys as well as jewelry

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[61] Nick Feucht, interview with author, Charlottesville, Virginia, November 21, 2013.

and purses. The market also sought to attract families from the surrounding neighborhoods with a variety of activities. The taco truck doubled as a venue for weekly cooking demonstrations, and a tent complete with soft carpets and stocked bookcases allowed parents an opportunity to read to their children. The Virginia Center for Latin American Art parked a mobile art bus at the market, where kids could create a traditional mosaic made with beans alongside a life-sized Frida Kahlo sculpture made from paper mache.

Finally, La Plaza benefitted from a group of creators and an organizational board that represented the Latino neighborhoods the market served. Most managers and prominent faces at the market were Latino, and all spoke Spanish. They cared deeply about the ability of the market to increase access to low-income and minority populations, and their efforts bore much success. Each week at the market, the consumer demographic proportionately represented the surrounding neighborhood. People of all races visited the market, though the plurality was indeed Latino. Many of the customers benefitted from the SNAP doubling program, often returning each week to buy as much produce as they could carry. Monolingual customers met Spanish-speaking vendors at virtually every booth, and children occupied themselves as their parents shopped for groceries. Overall, the cultural focus of La Plaza Latino Market certainly counteracted the stereotype of affluent whiteness that often surrounds farmers markets and remedied the cavernous produce gap that the food desert neighborhood experienced. The market will return this summer, and it has expanded to other locations as well.

In contrast, the City Market in Charlottesville, Virginia brims with white faces on a typical Saturday, despite solving transportation and cost barriers. Indeed, the market runs near several low-income and minority neighborhoods, such as the primarily African-American 10th and Page neighborhood, as well as public housing projects like Friendship Court located one block south. Less than a mile away, residents of these neighborhoods can access the market by foot or on a free trolley offered by the Charlottesville Area Transit system. In addition, the market accepts SNAP benefits and matches purchases made with SNAP worth up to ten dollars through a coupon program funded by the Wholesome Wave Foundation. However, market visitors still do not proportionately represent the City of Charlottesville. According to a recent study, 80 percent of shoppers are white, and 75 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher. While 37 percent of Charlottesville residents earn less than $25,000 per year, only 11 percent of market shoppers do.[62] In addition, a prominent community of immigrants from African countries and Burma generally does not attend the market.

The disparity in demographics between the market population and the surrounding city population means that the SNAP matching program remains underutilized. Kyle Gardiner, the SNAP and Financial Coordinator for the nonprofit Market Central that administers the programs for SNAP and debit card purchases, provided insight. Most SNAP users attend sparingly, and they prove disproportionately responsive to bad weather. In cold temperatures or rain, the relative drop in SNAP customers proves much higher than the drop in debit customers. He observed that a plurality of SNAP users fit the cultural expectations of customers who would visit the market without the matching program. Therefore, the program benefits young counter-cultural mothers and "hippie" types that are already conscious of the benefits of farmers markets but fails to reach out to a large low-income population that does not attend the market.

The majority of white faces and the failure of the SNAP program to reach out to low-income populations have roots in a variety of factors. For one, many people perceive that

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[62] Anne de Chastonay, Carla Jones, Natalie Roper, and Erica Stratton, "Have a Stake in the Market: Collecting, Analyzing, and Sharing Data in Support of the Charlottesville City Market" (JPC Report, University of Virginia, 2011).

shopping at the City Market is more expensive than shopping at the grocery store. For the most part, and especially in terms of fresh produce, this perception proves unfounded. Farmers market prices can often compete with grocery store prices for most products except those with high-intensity production methods, such as berries and meats. Shoppers can often purchase in-season produce at prices near or lower than those at the grocery store. For example, a conventional vendor called Potluck Farms sells tomatoes for $1.50 per pound at the peak of the season, compared to two dollars a pound at Food Lion, and organic tomatoes fetch a slightly higher price.

In addition, the format of shopping at the City Market often proves radically different than what low-income populations are accustomed to. For example, they must choose between four or five stands that sell exactly the same product, often for the same price. In general, consumers do not respond well to a vast amount of choice, so shopping at the farmers market can overwhelm low-income or minority populations if they are not assimilated in a smooth manner. Purchasing directly from the producer provides a stark contrast from the anonymity of the supermarket, and most seasoned shoppers at the City Market appear to know exactly how to interact with farmers and each other. The high-energy, high-volume environment can intimidate new customers. Finally, the market provides very little compatibility for non-native English speakers, save a few Latino farmers spread across the grounds.

The Charlottesville City Market has neglected to embrace several potential solutions that could attract low-income and minority populations from the market. For example, the market's dearth of minority farmers can discourage minority populations from entering. Only four Latino vendors sell produce at the market, compared to about 45 white produce vendors.[63] The market does purvey a variety of ethnic prepared foods, such as Filipino fare, Chinese dumplings, and Mexican tacos. However, the orientation towards cultural food attracts a mostly white, ethnically vacuous population that sees the dishes as an exotic luxury. Low-income people do not come to the market for prepared food and cannot purchase prepared food with SNAP benefits. African Americans run two of the staple baked goods booths,[64] but the presence of minority baked goods vendors does not increase access to healthy foods. While minorities are better represented among prepared food vendors, the whiteness of produce vendors can discourage SNAP users from coming to the market to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

Clearly, the presence of ethnic prepared food stands provides evidence of the market's attempts to cater to the tastes of affluent white customers. However, the market has made very few attempts to cater to the cultural preferences of minorities in its product mix. Instead, the market primarily offers produce perceived as "high-class." The difference between the types of produce sold and the grocery store and the City Market provides a real barrier to minority populations who may not be used to greens like kale or arugula. For example, Radical Roots, one of the most prominent vendors at the market, sells five different types of lettuce, none of which are iceberg and all of which are unfamiliar to food-insecure populations new to the market.[65] In contrast, all of the Latino farmers sell conventionally grown produce. While low-income populations do have the option to purchase conventional produce at lower prices than organic, it may prove difficult to find the four conventional farmers surrounded by ten times as many non-conventional vendors.

Perhaps real change in minority vendor representation and culturally appropriate product mix would stem from minority and low-income participation in organizational boards. However, such a solution proves infeasible because the market's organizational resources remain

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[63] Gardiner, interview, 2013.
[64] Gardiner, interview, 2013.
[65] Gardiner, interview, 2013.

exceedingly weak. The market's two managers work part-time and lack the resources to build a greater vision for the market that includes outreach to low-income and minority populations. In reality, the organizational infrastructure necessary to include minorities and low-income community members does not exist.

The market does have a board of vendors, but it faces several structural problems that preclude the inclusion of minority vendors. First, the board does not have much power and is rarely convened or consulted when decisions about the market are made. Second, the very nature of the market's farmers results in a board that does not proportionately represent the vendors. Most of the vendors are younger environmentalist "hippie" types driven by the desire to challenge industrial food pathways. They recognize the value of organizational boards in community efforts. Therefore, the vendor board tends to over-represent the left-leaning young counter-cultural farmers that are indeed most likely to be white and more affluent than vendors on average. In contrast, all four of the Latino farmers run conventional farms. As conventional farmers, they typically run much larger operations that serve a number of markets, so they often cannot devote their time towards developing the City Market in particular. For these reasons, minority representation in managerial boards or vendor boards remains unlikely at the City Market.[66]

Though the Charlottesville City Market has addressed transportation and cost barriers that exclude food-insecure populations from the market, it has not managed to address the more formidable aura of affluent whiteness that discourages low-income and minority populations from participating. The culture of the City Market, like many other farmers markets around the country, results from the rise of urban sprawl and industrial agriculture, ignorance of the racial realities of agriculture, and the importance of counter-cultural ideology. However, farmers markets can still return to their historically inclusive nature and further their goal of increasing access to healthy foods in food desert neighborhoods. Markets such as La Plaza Latino Market in Richmond, Virginia have embraced solutions such as choosing locations that service multiple demographics, catering to various cultural preferences in their product mix, representing minorities as vendors, and incorporating low-income and minority groups in organizational capacities. Making such changes may challenge farmers market managers to strike a balance between the dual goals of supporting local farmers and increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, but in doing so they could create vast new opportunities for food justice movements to address serious inequities in the food environment.

[66] Gardiner, interview, 2013.

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