



**FOOD
FUTURES**
**Food Justice,
Sustainability,
and
Well-Being**

Kate Daughdrill

Community dinner, 2014
Burnside Farm, Detroit

“Burnside Farm is an urban farm and artistic hub on the east side of Detroit. It’s a place where art, plants, neighbors, and healing come together. During the growing season, the neighbors and artists of Burnside host regular dinners in the garden—most of the food coming right from the garden and grilled on a homemade cinder block grill. The spirit of the farm is to cultivate a life-giving, healing space and an overall sense of well-being in the people, plants, neighbors, and animals who are a part of it.” —Kate Daughdrill



Fighting Metabolic Dominance

Anthony Ryan Hatch

¹ David Axe, "This Scientist Wants Tomorrow's Troops to Be Mutant Powered," *Wired*, Dec. 26, 2012.

² Anthony Ryan Hatch, *Blood Sugar: Racial Pharmacology and Food Justice in Black America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

³ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

In 2002, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency launched a new military biomodification program called *metabolic dominance*.¹ Its purpose was to create a supersoldier whose biochemistry could be manipulated to overcome the biological limits imposed by their environment, such as the need to eat, sleep, breathe. Like Captain America, they would no longer be subject to the normal metabolic constraints of the human body. Imagine the military implanting microcomputers into soldiers' endocrine glands that can turn on the hormonal signals that say "eat" or "stop eating." A soldier could fight for days without having to sleep or perhaps swim underwater for much longer than expected. It makes sense to me why the US military would be interested in metabolism as a medium for the production of supersoldiers. From a biomedical perspective, metabolism encompasses all of the chemical reactions that unfold within the body, processes that allow us to derive energy from food, take oxygen from air, and interact with a host of biochemicals that flow between us and our environment.² Manipulating the basic metabolic functioning of organisms is an extreme form of Foucauldian biopolitics where bodies become the very battlegrounds on and through which biological warfare is waged.

Metabolic dominance also offers us new language to talk about food futures, racial power, and bodies. Metabolic dominance is all about using a wide range of technologies to control and transform the biochemistry that creates interdependence between bodies and ecologies. While the military has been trying to tinker with the metabolism of its troops, transnational food companies and governments have long successfully altered and profited from the transformations of our collective metabolisms.

In this broader social sense, metabolic dominance begins with the system of racial capitalism established by European and American colonial powers: monocropping through slavery-based agricultural production systems. The term *racial capitalism* comes from Cedric Robinson, who sought to theorize and historicize the worldwide system of capitalism in its full racial context.³ He argued that European societies were already racially and ethnically organized when the transition from feudalism to capitalism took place. Racial distinction and subordination were metaphorically baked into the cake of capitalism.

4 John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 158.

5 John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

Under racial capitalism, the mass production and consumption of the major colonial agricultural commodities—sugar, rice, tobacco, coffee, and cotton—exploded. These forms of agriculture and economy, imposed by colonizing settlers on Indigenous lands and populations all over the world, have been a principal driver of climate change, ecological toxicity, and human death and disability. In other words, they constitute the systems that enforce metabolic domination in our time.

Karl Marx also used the concept of metabolism in his social theories “to describe the complex, dynamic, interdependent set of needs and relations brought into being and constantly reproduced in alienated form under capitalism, and the question of human freedom it raised.”⁴ For Marx, metabolism is the process by which human labor generates and redistributes the productive energies trapped within nature, a process that was on full display in the rise of industrial agriculture. By laboring in agriculture (either for subsistence or under enslavement), humans cultivate and transform the energy in food into a form of social exchange that doubles a means of biological subsistence, much like the way in which the microbes that live within our gut digest (or metabolize) the food we eat. But the transformation of energy from one form into another has breathtaking consequences.

The system of racial capitalism is at war with the Earth and its inhabitants.⁵ Over an astonishingly short period of time, racial capitalism has transformed ecological and multispecies life to the point where no material things exist outside of the system of private property. Literally everything is thoroughly commodified, including life itself.

Through the hyperproduction and -consumption of agricultural commodities under racial capitalism, humans have created what Marx called a *metabolic rift* that disturbs the complex ecological relationships between species and ecosystems. By using more land, more machines, more chemicals, and more monocrops to grow food for profit, we are destroying the metabolic processes that sustain life on Earth. This rapacious system ravages the land, us, and everything with it. The disruption of complex nutrient and waste cycles, the transformation of interspecies relationships, and the mass extraction and burning of fossil fuels are forging the metabolic rift at the precipice of the Anthropocene. The greater the rift, the more jagged its

6 Anna Brones, “Karen Washington: It’s Not a Food Desert, It’s Food Apartheid,” *Guernica*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.guernicamag.com/karen-washington-its-not-a-food-desert-its-food-apartheid>.

edge, and the deeper the alienation that separates humans from the rest of nature. This metabolic rift has both ecological and social costs, the most important of which may be climate change and catastrophe.

How can the global peasantry take for itself the inalienable right to food sovereignty, good health, and environmental justice from racial capitalism? The current unequal distribution of resources is not an accident. Eight people hoard as much wealth as half of the people living on Earth—these folks are not going to give up the loot without a fight. Private corporate interests have completed the regulatory capture of our governments—corporations, especially food corporations, are today able to fund political campaigns, write new laws, and police their own bad behavior. Moreover, the thin veneer that perhaps once protected science and medicine from the corrupting influence of private money has long been pierced. Our major institutions of economy, government, and science have all matured and ripened in the context of racial capitalism and work to support the subordination of billions through metabolic pathways.

As we yearn for a future in which food is produced sustainably (by means of vibrant, local, organic polycultures) and for the benefit and well-being of all creatures, human and nonhuman alike, we have to confront the systems of metabolic dominance that keep that future at arm’s length. A socially just and equitable world is inconceivable in a racially unequal silent spring. It is hard to envision a futuristic Garden of Eden with solar panels and organic gardens built from the bones of the dead within segregated “green zones” (think Iraq) for the poor and “blue zones” (exceptionally healthy places) for the privileged and lucky. Without a direct challenge to racial capitalism, our food future will continue to look and feel more like what activist Karen Washington rightly calls “food apartheid.”⁶ We can’t stop climate change and ecological destruction until we dismantle racial capitalism.

A People’s Food Police

Former North Charleston, South Carolina, police officer Michael Slager is currently an inmate in the Federal Correctional Institution, Englewood, serving a twenty-year sentence for violating the civil rights of fifty-year-old

⁷ American Heart Association Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics Subcommittee, “Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2017 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association,” *Circulation* 135, no. 10 (March 7, 2017).

⁸ Miriam Van Dyke et al., “Heart Disease Death Rates among Blacks and Whites Aged ≥35—United States, 1968–2015,” *CDC Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report* 67, no. 5 (March 30, 2018).

father and Coast Guard veteran Walter Scott. We all watched in horror as Slager shot Scott in the back following a botched traffic stop on April 4, 2015. Slager discharged his weapon eight times, hitting Scott three times in the back, once in the leg, and once in the ear. Not only did Slager lie in official reports about Scott stealing his Taser and lunging at him with it, he also planted evidence of the lie at the crime scene. Scott was unarmed when he was killed.

When the police shoot to kill a Black person, they often do so based on the erroneous and racist claim that Blackness in general and this particular Black body represents an imminent threat to the racial police state, and to the concept of whiteness, and to white bodies themselves. In reality, quite the opposite is true: the racial state is a danger to Black bodies.

The function of the actual police is to protect the property and constitutional rights of America’s original gangsters—settlers and plantation owners. What if we could have the *people’s food police*? The traditional food police governs people’s food choices with scientific facts about what’s healthy for people and the planet. They issue tickets: moral condemnation from a position of ethical superiority (often tied to systems of gender, class, and racial advantage) that perpetually blames individuals and groups who have no sovereignty to produce the foods they are forced to buy. To punch back, the people’s food police would work on behalf of all people, especially the least among us, to turn control over the entire food system back to the people. This force would be made up of freedom fighters working on the side of those of us who need to eat to live and don’t want to die from eating.

In 2015, US police killed 104 unarmed Black people, which results in a rate five times that of the killing of unarmed white people. In stark contrast, chronic metabolic illnesses (heart disease, diabetes, stroke, obesity) have killed scores more Black people. In 2014, diabetes, stroke, and heart attacks killed 68,990 Black adults.⁷ Back in 1968, there were no racial disparities in heart disease death rates; rates for all groups have decreased substantially since the late 1960s. Yet the Black-white disparity in heart disease death rates increased 16.3 percent from 1968 to 2015.⁸ These Black deaths and racial disparities are not caused by inherent biological, genetic, or heritable traits

⁹ Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 437–44.

that are specific to Black people; these Black deaths are caused by white supremacy as envisioned and institutionalized through metabolic domination.

If one goal of antiracism is to end the killing and devaluing of Black bodies, shouldn’t Black people have their own food police who are empowered to stand their ground against an anti-Black food system that kills thousands each year? Corporations are people, too, says the Supreme Court, but is it murder to kill one? Can Black people mobilize “stand your ground” defenses against social institutions that seem to be out for our blood (sugar)?

I wish we could shift the awesome power of the police state to initiate a technologically advanced and well-funded militarized campaign against the industrial food system. We could call it “food regime change.” Instead of brutalizing the Black and brown masses with guns, tanks, and prisons, this food police force would act with immunity and impunity and dark hearts, taking out all the pumpkin spice cakes and Sysco truck-refueling stations and soda-manufacturing plants—just like the US military did in their “shock and awe” operation in the sovereign nation of Iraq. Decapitating corporate regimes would be facilitated with a “most wanted” deck of cards identifying the executives of murderous companies and their coconspirators in government and science.

Break in Case of Emergency

I have a vision of those glass boxes with “Break in Case of Emergency” etched on the front. What emergency protocols for the global peasantry sit behind the glass? What are the prospects for the scale of social, technological, and ecological transformations required to turn back unprecedented inequality, climate change, ecological degradation, and the food crisis? In this context, it’s really challenging, *for me*, to consider the soft reform approach sufficient for the building of a world order that puts the last first and the first last. The global peasantry needs a new world order. A provocative book called *The Great Leveler* by Stanford historian Walter Scheidel argues that peaceful social reforms “may well prove unequal to the growing challenges ahead”; only total thermonuclear war can provide the seismic jolt needed to fundamentally reset the current distribution of resources.⁹ No doubt

this is a radical proposition. But we have to be sober about the kinds of systems we are facing and the kinds of force relations that are strong enough to dislodge and dismantle them.

The global one-percenters are already in emergency mode, building luxury militarized yachts to prepare for rising oceans and the inevitable collapse. I think of them as modern-day arks, like those represented in the Roland Emmerich film *2012*. These yachts are equipped with anti-aircraft missiles and advanced communication and life-support systems. They are getting ready for another great flood.

Maybe this is what President Trump’s Space Force is all about. Too bad about all that space garbage that will make the Space Force difficult to deploy. Maybe Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos has a solution, but watch out. They might not have space for anybody from the 99 percent. While white-controlled private corporations develop robust rocketry systems in an attempt to establish a for-profit market for the wealthy, the rest of us are stuck in the terminal crisis without an emergency plan. On this very point, listen to Jarobi in the 2016 song “The Space Program” from *A Tribe Called Quest*:

Molotov the spaceship though before that bitch is
taking off
It always seems the poorest persons are people
forsaken, dog
No Washingtons, Jeffersons, Jacksons on the captain’s log
They’d rather lead us to the grave, water poisoned,
deadly smog
Mass un-blackening, it’s happening, you feel it y’all?
They’d rather see we have a three-by-three structure
with many bars
Leave us where we are so they can play among the stars
We’re taking off to Mars, got the space vessels
overflowing
What, you think they want us there? All us niggas
not going!

Unlike Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, we can’t leave planet Earth. And I’m not necessarily advocating direct violent action against corporate targets. Rather, I’m suggesting that we need to resist the dynamics of metabolic dominance in this world. A converging set of terminal

metabolic crises—unprecedented wealth inequality enabled by crippling political corruption, catastrophic climate change, metabolic health pandemics, and total environmental toxicity—is upending our planet. If our metabolic crises come to pass, the Earth will remain, changed by us yet sooner or later without us. ▲

Kate Daughdrill

artist

Anthony Ryan Hatch

scholar

Leah Penniman

farmer

Isolde Brielmaier **Good, healthy food nourishes the mind, body, and spirit. Food now and in the future must be considered in relation to equity, social justice, sustainability, and the well-being of all people as well as of our planet. Where and how do we conceive of the basic concepts of food justice and food security? How are they connected to us as individuals, in your work, and in communities locally and globally?**

Leah Penniman It's so important to define words in the context of who created them. The idea of food justice and food sovereignty is rooted in Indigenous communities around the world, as seen in La Via Campesina network. Previously, folks were talking about food from the access point of view. Who has it, who doesn't, how many greens are on the plate, how many chips are on the plate? That certainly matters. But when we talk about food justice, we're getting into power and control, into democracy, and into the economy.

We need to start asking not just who's eating food, but who controls the land? Who gets to farm? Who controls the seed? Who controls the markets? Who decides what's grown? What profit share is going to farm workers as compared to multinational corporations? As my daughter, Neshima, says, the food system is everything it takes to get sunshine onto your plate. It's about justice all the way through.

At Soul Fire Farm, it is about paying attention to the whole food system. We run a farm on eighty acres; we grow vegetables, eggs, and all that is necessary; and we box that up every week and bring it to the doorsteps of people who need it most. That includes refugees, new Americans, folks impacted by mass incarceration, and they pay whatever they can afford. And we're training and supporting the next generation of Black and Indigenous farmers—this is a generation that has been excluded from leadership in the food system in the United States. We're working on reparations and policy change. So it goes beyond access.

Anthony Ryan Hatch The term *food security* was established by the US government to give the government a way to describe patterns of access to food. You're either food secure—you have access to food locally, within a mile or so—or food insecure. That was the central metric by which the government was looking at questions of food, health, and nutrition. It was all about access and proximity.

The term *food security* places food in the context of a discourse of war and of the state and its power. Some of my thinking looks at food as a technology of war and how we wrestle that out of the hands of people who seek to make war on us through food and take it in another direction. This is more about *food sovereignty*, where we actually have a place to grow and a place to have some control over our food. We want to shift the conversation away from thinking about securitization and who is secure and insecure. We already know who that is.

Kate Daughdrill I found my way into farming organically. When I finished graduate school at Cranbrook Academy of Art, outside of Detroit, I volunteered at Earthworks, a farm in the city. It was the most diverse group of people that I had worked with: people with homes, without homes, all ages, all

backgrounds and races, all ethnicities. There were thirty of us. We gardened, and then we'd sit in a circle and talk about race and food justice and how all people deserve access to good food. We would discuss what's getting in the way of this. I had never before experienced people of different backgrounds coming together to work and then to talk about these issues. I hadn't been a "plant person," but I just naturally started to become one after that first encounter.

I bought a house in Detroit, and there were vacant lots next to it. So I said, well, it makes sense to garden. I invited my neighbors to garden with me, and we started gardening. Growing food completely changed my life. My art practice and my gardening practice fused, and I began to see how food could bring people together as a creative medium around dinners, around edible creative activities. My neighborhood is really diverse—Bengali, Yemeni, Black, white. It used to be made up of Polish and Ukrainian auto-worker homes. That mix of different people coming together and seeing how each person has something to contribute to the garden, and also to their own gardens, has been magical. I came to food justice from a sense of seeing this elemental life-giving thing that we all need—how are people taking control of that for themselves? And with people from all these different backgrounds, how are we working together to do that? Where do we have strengths to help one another?

IB All three of you have raised notions of power and access. Who are the different actors in food politics? Who influences decisions and policies around the control, distribution, and access of food production?

ARH Scholars use the idea of a food regime to describe the constellation of actors, laws, policies, and regulations that govern the food system. While we have to see it as a global system that has local roots, we're really talking about two central institutions of power. On the one hand, nation-states have for 150 years used food, both its production and consumption, as a tool of international relations. More recently, multinational corporations have privatized the food system in ways that wrestle power away from everyday citizens all over the world, including farmers. So we're talking about big institutions, and we're talking about trade policy.

We're also talking about World Trade Organization rules, which govern how much of a given commodity a country can make, how much they can export, and the prices for those commodities, which limit the resources that everyday farmers can garner for the commodities they grow. These are big macro-institutional forces that are largely hidden from us. When we go to the grocery store, whether it's the local farmers market or the Whole Foods or the traditional supermarket, we don't really know the institutions that touch the food we eat. That part is something we have to demystify.

When you demystify it, you see people getting together to put things in the earth and then magically, actually chemically, things grow. But corporations would have you think that they are the only ones who can do it. Think about rendering visible these big institutional forces that remain largely hidden from us. How was it that they got to do this? Who

decided that it was okay for them to have power over us like this? To have power over us in this way, for people to be able to govern us like this, requires that we acquiesce to it, that we voluntarily submit to it in some way. We have to decide that we're not going to be governed in this way anymore. To wrestle back power means to reject the mystification that corporations and states wield over us in terms of food.

IB We're also talking about lack of information. Leah, what you're doing with your community is focused on this.

LP In terms of the amount of money, the Farm Bill is the largest piece of legislation we have in this country. It governs our entire food system. Because I have direct contact with thousands of Black and brown farmers, my job has increasingly become to have my ear to the ground to see how these massive policies and corporate contracts impact real people and then translate that for the folks who are lobbying. I was on a call with the National Black Food and Justice Alliance earlier today and the HEAL Food Alliance last week to develop these campaigns.

Farming is a highly subsidized industry. Until the 1980s, there were price supports that guaranteed a minimum price for your milk or your grain. That was dismantled and replaced with crop insurance. Almost every farmer gets some kind of government money; otherwise, they would close down. It's why we have cheap food. It's why the market is flooded with commodities like wheat and corn and soy. But over generations, Black farmers have been excluded from these subsidies.

Martin Luther King Jr. gave a famous speech shortly before he was assassinated in which he talked about how the federal government had provided the white peasant farmer with land through the Homestead Act: land grant universities, loans with low interest rates to facilitate mechanization, and payments to not farm as part of the Conservation Reserve Program, which protects soil fertility. But Black farmers didn't get this assistance. As a result, there was a decline from Black farmers making up 14 percent of farmers in 1910 to 1 percent today. Then, in 1999, Black farmers won the Pigford Case, the largest class action civil rights suit in the history of this country. But by then most of the farmers were in their eighties and nineties. They'd lost their land and moved out of their communities. I did a study with *YES!* magazine a couple of years ago, and we found that even though the USDA has been called to account, there are still huge racial disparities if you look at how their money is actually being distributed. So we're pushing for distributing loans and technical assistance fairly among all farmers. And there needs to be redress for past harms.

Another story of how big institutional forces affect real people is around the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. My maternal lineage is Haitian. One part of the Farm Bill is called tied aid. It says that if we're going to give food aid, it has to be from US farmers, shipped on US ships, and processed by US corporations. All fine and good, right? But think about rice harvest season. All the peasant farmers in Haiti are getting ready to bring their rice to market. At the same time, Monsanto conveniently

brings barge-loads of free hybridized and genetically modified seeds to dump on the Haitian market.

Monsanto would be very happy to give out this seed to decimate the Haitian economy and to create dependency. But the president of Haiti tells the ship to turn around. Monsanto refuses, and the peasant movement, which we're a part of and with which we organize, burned the shipment when it came in. They won a global food sovereignty prize. They said, "No thank you, we have our own creole rice, and we're going to share it among ourselves the way we always have. If you want to help us, you can support our local food economy, but you can't supplant it with this corporate hegemony." US policy impacts not just farmers here, but also peasant farmers in Haiti and around the world.

IB Kate, do you think about some of these larger structures? How do you bring that down to a more local, community level?

KD A lot of my journey with food and the land really did come from this inside-out experience. My journey started from the level of my own body and my own eating and my own healing and my own relating to one plant and learning how to do that in a community and with other people and through getting engaged with my local farmers market.

Detroit has the biggest historic farmers market in North America, in terms of land size. It's a thriving area where people of all different backgrounds come together. It honestly feels like church to me. Everyone has food that they feel a connection to. It's a beautiful thing. Keep Growing Detroit is an amazing program that equips people with starts and with seeds and with education for growing. People grow food in more than four thousand farms or gardens in Detroit. Three times throughout the growing season there is a big day where people all come and get their starts. There's this element of people and organizations equipping one another with the tools for growing their own food.

The goal is to be 51 percent food sovereign, meaning 51 percent of the food consumed in Detroit is being grown by Detroiters. Detroiters could actually do that with just 4 percent of the vacant land that we have available—it's a unique situation. I learned about that and met other people and heard about the deep, long work that has been done, specifically by Black Detroiters over the last thirty or forty years. Starting in the 1950s and 1960s, capitalism and certain consumer systems left Detroit, business trickled out, and people were learning to take care of themselves and growing their own food and making windmills in the city and starting to harvest their own energy. It became essential to ask, If there aren't as many 9 to 5 jobs, how do we take care of our own basic needs? What's work in a more expansive, creative sense? What does it really mean to be a human? You need food, water, some energy, and you need to trade with people to figure out how to build things.

The Osborn neighborhood in northeast Detroit received a public art grant, and they invited me and Mira Burack to create an Edible Hut. The community wanted a place to come together, to rebuild trust, and that was centered around food as a healing tool for their relationships in

a neighborhood where there's a lot of vacancy and crime. So we built a gathering place out of an old garage. The whole roof is covered with living, edible plants—a living sculpture. But the real work of it was creating a group for neighbors of the Edible Hut. We had potlucks on the site of this place every month for four years before it was finished and when it was completed. We built an amazing association of schools and neighborhood groups. We cooked, we shared healthy food, we ate from the roof. The space really became this way to hold space for people wanting to take care of themselves and one another.

I had the direct physical experience of seeing how people provide food for themselves—how I, a lot of my neighbors, and the growers in Detroit became more empowered.

IB How do we make the connection between hands-on training, education, and individuals and communities? What happens on a day-to-day level with people?

LP Fannie Lou Hamer is well-known for her work with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. She is less well-known for her work with the Freedom Farm Cooperative, which was a family housing co-op and farm she founded in the late 1960s. It provided food and education and scholarships for Sunflower County, Mississippi. I think of her as an ancestor when it comes to practicality, because she would gather a bunch of activists in a room to organize for political power. And she would say, "Y'all, if you have four hundred quarts of greens and gumbo soup canned for the winter, nobody can push you around or tell you what to do. If you don't have those four hundred quarts, you might go and rabble rouse and scream and yell, but as soon as they shut down that grocery store, you're going to be begging and pleading for them to get that machine going again because you don't have the means of your own survival." That is really where our day-to-day is rooted. We believe that to get free as a people, and in this case, we're talking about Black, Indigenous, and people of color, we need to be able to feed ourselves.

One of the programs that came out of that desire for community self-determination at Soul Fire Farm is called "BIPOC FIRE! Black-Indigenous-People-of-Color Farming in Relationship with Earth." It is a fifty-hour, week-long beginner training in farming. It covers everything from bed prep to seed to harvest to marketing and business planning, infused with a trauma lens that is about rewriting the story of our relationship to land as something wider and deeper than just the oppression that took place there. We're up at 6:00 a.m., and we do a little stretch and say, "Thank you for the day." It's a hands-on class—we cook and eat together, we have classroom activities, we have ritual, we have storytelling, we have history. We really become a family through it.

There is a lot of power in creating food and community on land. Once folks have gone through the program, they're forever Soul Fire family. We follow up with mentorships and help getting land, a job, a scholarship, a fellowship. We do everything we can to make sure that our alumni can enact the food sovereignty plans that they create while they're in the

program, whether that's urban farming, rural farming, or some type of advocacy project.

Gaining access to the land is not to excuse the need for wholesale reparations. But there has been a shift in consciousness, and people have put together the fact that 80 percent of wealth in this country is inherited. Most of that is property, and about half is traceable back to slavery. If you include the genocide of Native people, that's almost all the wealth. According to Pew Research, today the average white baby is born with sixteen times the wealth of the average Black baby.

You add up all those facts, and if you're a conscious person with a heart and you've got some wealth, you probably realize it's not really yours. It was built on stolen land and stolen labor and a whole series of policies that are clumped together as white affirmative action. So we've catalyzed what we're calling a voluntary reparations project. We have a map where BIPOC put up their farm projects, and they might need a tractor, they might need forty acres—the forty acres and a mule that were never given, by the way. We have about seventy or so people on this map, and thirteen folks have gotten land through this project. Many of the donors have also gone through Uprooting Racism trainings that have been offered by alumni and folks in our network. It's been inspiring to know that people to people, heart to heart, mind to mind, we can actually catalyze this change and just get going.

ARH One astounding fact to share is that Monsanto and Bayer Pharmaceuticals have merged. Monsanto controls most of the genetic information about the seeds that are grown all around the world, and Bayer Pharmaceuticals is one of the largest drug companies in the world. Why? Why would it be a good idea to have food and pharmaceutical companies under the same umbrella of capital? My suspicion, which I articulate in my book *Blood Sugar*—it's a little conspiratorial—is that the foods we are fed make us sick. The book is about metabolic syndrome, which is a way of measuring who's at risk for a heart attack or a stroke. Overweight, hypertensive, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, inflammation—if you have multiple of these risk factors simultaneously, you're said to have metabolic syndrome. My book analyzes the science of this construct that when you're made sick, you're forced to go to the pharmacy to buy medicines that are supposed to heal you. I think that we should, as a citizenry, as a people, be greatly concerned about the coming together of the food and pharmaceutical industries in the United States and around the world. Why would they do that unless it's a good idea for them?

I was thinking about this in relation to my own family. I have type 1 diabetes. I have been on injected insulin for twenty-six years. We just did the food budget for my family of four. If we're honest about how much money we spend, the food budget for the grocery store alone is around \$1,800 a month. Most folks can't afford \$1,800 a month—I'm not sure we should afford \$1,800 a month. But it's really hard to go from having two parents working full time to participating in a food sovereignty program.

KD I can share a little on that because I grew up eating cheese, hot dogs, cookie dough... I even remember eating Gatorade powder. I would eat it

with a spoon because it was so good. So that's where I came from—not having an intimate relationship with the earth or with gardening or with plants or with food. Then I started to be near the earth—physically gardening and planting one plant and watching it grow. Then I ate the food of that plant and I realized how amazing it tasted. It wasn't like food from a grocery store. It tasted different, and my body started to feel different. It wasn't because someone told me, “You should eat healthy and here's how to eat healthy”; it was the direct experience of doing it.

I was lucky to get a house off an auction very cheaply. I lived with one extension cord from the basement and no fridge for nine months; I put in a wood stove for my heat. It's a dramatic example of how you make it work. But I decided I wanted to feed myself from this land, work with my neighbors, go to the farmers market and get the things I needed there to supplement what I grew myself. I've lived off \$12,000 a year for the last eight years because I own my house, I can eat much of what I grow, and I freeze food. I've found ways to do it simply, but it does take my whole life to provide for myself.

As an artist, there are times when I see my art and my farming come together. But to live simply and eat well and make that shift takes so much of my time. As I travel to connect with people and to learn and share, I ask myself, Where do I buy food that's affordable to me in living simply, and how do I provide for some of my own needs? There have to be some ways that the pie can be sliced where we're between paradigms or we have different tools of trying to live in a more nourishing way with food. But it's a mystery to me as I travel.

IB **So many people in the world have food sovereignty integrated into daily living and have had it so for generations. But for many other people in the world, we're making a shift—it's a different experience. How do we begin, especially when it is not for lack of wanting but maybe lack of access to information?**

LP It's challenging when we put the onus on the individual, because we're in a societal context. I knew how to farm when I was living in the south end of Albany, which is a food apartheid neighborhood. There was no supermarket, no grocery stores, no room in the community garden. We didn't have a car. The only way we could get fresh vegetables for our children was to walk 2.2 miles up the hill to a CSA dropoff at the Quaker meetinghouse, pile the vegetables on top of the two-year-old in the stroller with the baby in the backpack, and walk the 2.2 miles back down the hill. The cost of the vegetables was more than our rent. And that's unreasonable. A lot of times we have this myth that if folks get educated, they will know they need to eat healthy. We've had thousands of young people, teenagers—hoods up, earbuds in, cute sneakers—and every single one of them loves the food from the farm. Why? Because they grew it. It's not a desire thing. There are a lot of solutions that need to be made.

Let's look at Costa Rica as a long-term example. They pay farmers subsidies for environmental services. If you are increasing the number of pollinators in your area because of your farming practices, if you are

increasing the amount of carbon in your soil, if you are engaging in watershed protection, you will get a government subsidy. Right now, subsidies in the United States are flipped. We give you money to trash the planet and drive the climate to chaos. So we need to look at the systemic things that drive the price of good food down and make it accessible to people.

One great thing that I've had to learn and remember is that our ancestors had all the answers. There are literally hundreds of Black- and brown-led organizations working on food justice that have thoughtful campaigns, policy platforms, information on what you can do. So it really is a question of opening up our awareness and saying, "How do I engage with these solutions that are already in motion on the ground?" We don't have to make up something new.

IB It's an incredibly complex ecosystem that consists of individuals, communities, and governments.

ARH Because I'm a sociologist by training, I'd be remiss if I didn't pick up on Leah's brilliant comment that this is not a problem for the wills or choices of individual people. These are systemic institutional crises. The food crisis is linked to the ecological crisis, and the ecological crisis is linked to a crisis in governing. Our rulers have decided that this is the way they want things to be.

Food is at the center of the climate crisis. If you look around the world, the forces driving climate change are grounded in the soil: what's put in it, what's taken out of it, the whole system. For example, we know about cows and cow gas, about pesticides, about biocides being put into the soil to grow commodity crops. At an institutional level, we're at a crisis point. Unless we envision a different way of governing these systems, our time is limited. These times call for dramatic institutional transformations and the kinds of reversals that Leah suggested in terms of incentivizing the good and de-incentivizing the harmful, in terms of putting power back in people's hands.

IB It's important to frame the crisis historically, because it's not as if these issues have just popped up. Those systems need to be examined and not only disrupted but dismantled, because they're clearly not working or they're working for a select few.

ARH The point is very simple: the systems were designed to do just this. They're not random; they're not broken. They were designed to do exactly what they're doing. They need to be reengineered and redesigned so that they serve different interests.

KD Monsanto has literally engineered their seed so that you cannot save it to then plant it. They are saying: "You have to rely on us and give us your money to get the seed again." The most essential human thing in the world is that life begets life. But the system is literally designed for a company to have power and money. A way we can engage is to grow food or to get it directly from someone we know who grows it, even if it's a small slice of how we get our food, and to know that we have

this power as individual creators—even if it's just herbs in our windows. That fuels this conversation and care to also keep working at the big policy level.

Audience What do you think of the current political approaches to climate change, specifically the Green New Deal?

LP I met this morning with leading Black farmers and advocates from across the country about the Green New Deal. We have some suggestions, but overall, we're for it. The policy summary mentions that the people most impacted by climate chaos are front-line communities—BIPOC and farm workers—but it does not translate how those communities are going to have a central role and voice in how the policy is laid out. We think it's important to center the voices of those communities. Farm workers are not mentioned, even though heat stress from climate chaos is impacting farm workers disproportionately. Also not mentioned are climate refugees, Black farmers, and land loss. So it's missing an analysis piece, and it's also missing a piece about community self-determination. But it's on the right track.

ARH That makes me think of the danger posed by the Green New Deal. That is, in order for it to be politically palatable in the United States, it's going to have to be seen to benefit white people. This is a well-known principle called interest convergence: we're not going to do anything to help Black people or poor people unless it also benefits those of us who have power. This is a framing issue. For the Green New Deal to win, it has to be strategically framed so that those who hold the reins of power have an interest in changing the conversation about power—the power that they themselves hold. That's hard. We've seen this again and again and again in this country: policy suggestions that ostensibly are going to improve conditions for the great majority of us end up not improving those conditions, and then we just think that it didn't work. It was designed not to work. It was designed to do exactly what it did.

LP The original New Deal was an amazing package. We had substantial workers' rights legislation for the first time, social security. But the southern Democrats would not vote for it if Black people were included in the legislation. I'm not being sensationalist: you can read the transcripts of the committee reports. So they created exclusionary clauses in the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act, which said all this good stuff about overtime pay, the right to unionize, child labor protections, limits to the workday, on and on. White folks can have it. But farm workers and domestic workers, who at the time were almost entirely folks of color, cannot have it. To this day, most of those laws have not been changed. Right now, there's Fairness for Farm Workers legislation being proposed that would rectify the FLSA and, for the first time, give farm workers the same legal protection that all other workers have.

ARH In other words, it's not a scientific question vis-à-vis Republicans and their belief in climate change. It's about political questions that support or challenge white supremacy.

LP We're going to write an open letter from hundreds of organizations, and other people can sign onto it. I'm not putting all my faith in politics to solve our problems, but we do need to engage with the opportunities that we have.

ARH For the Green New Deal to be successful as a policy, we as a nation have to address the health-care crisis. Those things are tied together. There's a ton of research that shows the links between the environment's health and our health. That's the piece that's missing from the Democrats' current plan.

KD I have seen a real shift in consciousness around food from many people, and a more mainstream consciousness around food. It's a first step: more people are reconnecting with the planet, and the planet is screaming for us to do something and shift the way that we're living. We're starting to see that; people are ready and they're open. We just need those avenues of learning.

Audience Farming is really hard. Even if you're able to swing the pendulum back toward smaller-scale farming and fairer political and economic frameworks for farmers, is there a next generation of young people who will want to accept that lifestyle? Will they put themselves at risk of flood, drought, all of that, as the climate gets worse and the conditions for farming are even harder? Do you see enthusiasm for people to step into farming to an extent that would allow us to feed ourselves?

LP That's a really important question, and I think it's a yes and a no. We really are in a crisis. The farming population is aging. Among Black farmers, the median age is around sixty-seven; it's a little bit younger for white farmers. Suicide rates are through the roof, particularly among dairy farmers here in New York.

Farming gets romanticized, but it's tough. Certainly the demand for our training programs is high—we have a multiyear waiting list. But less than half of those folks want to farm at the scale it takes to feed the community. There are a lot of people who want to do admirable urban gardening and community gardening. But in terms of really feeding folks, we need to have that national conversation about how we make the conditions possible for farmers to survive. Right now, 95 percent of small farmers in this country rely on outside income. What are we going to do as a society to make sure farming offers a viable living? Because we can't survive without farmers. This is the problem of our generation.

Audience Veganism is often framed as the saving grace of a sustainable diet. But that's not the case, because often you have to cut down rainforests to plant soy to have protein to be a vegan. And it's unaffordable for a lot of people. It feels impossible for an individual to have a large impact with a personal diet. Do you think that perpetuating the myth of one way to eat, one way to be, is at all helpful or does it do more harm than good?

ARH Look around the world. There are seven billion folks on the planet. There are many varied cultures of eating around the world. Veganism is not going to save anybody from anything. And while you might be harming

animals less, you're harming humans: by purchasing more fruits and vegetables and grains, you're keeping an exploitative system in place.

It's usually a good idea to eat things that don't come in boxes.

LP I definitely concur that, as a world, we need to cut down on our meat consumption. There's no question that there's just not enough water and land and green space. We need to adjust not the scale but the absolutism of veganism. This is coming from a thirteen-year vegan, and I had my heart handed back to me while living among Indigenous communities. I came to understand that this one-size-fits-all diet can be super imperialist. There are whole communities that are excluded from their traditional hunting grounds by organizations like the Nature Conservancy. They proclaim an ethos of saying, we've trashed all of our resources, so we're going to preserve yours; you can't have your traditional ways of eating, which are actually super sustainable. If you are eating small animals that browse on native vegetation, that's sustainable because the small animals can take a high-fiber plant that's not edible to humans and convert it into an edible protein. It's important to live in that nuance and not be absolutist or imperialist with our diets. There are myriad ways to eat well for the sustainability of the planet.

Audience What is your perspective on the role that philanthropy plays in community farming or farming in general?

KD In Detroit, so many people are farming at a small scale and supplementing how they live. I have mentors at Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, which just received a \$500,000 ArtPlace grant to bring together art and farming. It helps the farm, but even so, Jerry Hebron and Billy Hebron, who run the farm, are getting a minimal salary. My friends who are full-time farmers and have an acre of land in the city are making a maximum of \$16,000 a year from farming.

I've seen challenges of big grants. I received one big grant to produce art events and other events for Burnside Farm that would bring our diverse neighbors together around food. It was so stressful that I actually just wanted to give the \$12,000 a year back. I wasn't ungrateful for it, and it was a beautiful program to facilitate, but the grant world comes with its own set of bureaucratic expectations, posturing, and the sudden need to document everything. I wanted separation from grant funding to have something more simple and pure. I'm trying to be at the scale of a one-block family farm, so I have a lot of respect for the needs of bigger operations.

LP We have a guide for philanthropic organizations to help them be less oppressive and less white supremacist. We actually had one organization offer money but then said they'd need someone on our board of directors to direct the future of the organization. No, no, no. Philanthropy needs to be accountable to front-line communities, not the other way around. It's an honor for them to share their wealth with the people who are doing the work on the ground. And there are coalitions like Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and EDGE Funders Alliance that are trying to shift the philanthropy world.

Audience I have become much more aware of the public health crisis around the consumption of added sugars in the American diet and in diets globally. It doesn't seem that we're going to interrupt that trend anytime soon. It's not just a governance issue—it's systemic and it has infiltrated everywhere. I'm curious about smaller interventions. A tax on drinks with sugar added has been instituted in Berkeley, California, and it has resulted in a reduction of the consumption of sweetened beverages. But there have been lots of people who've said that type of tax is regressive and makes poor people who live in neighborhoods where soda might be the easiest source of calories pay a tax while the system itself remains untouched. Are there smaller-scale interventions that some of us might want to lobby for or be alert to and supportive of?

ARH I've been studying sugar biologically and socially for a while now. At the end of the 1800s, we were producing around eight million metric tons of sugar globally. This year, we're probably going to produce around two hundred million metric tons of sugar globally. It's been a linear increase, and someone's got to eat all of that. We see the direct effects of sugar flooding our food ecosystems and our bodies and the land. I'm beginning to take the approach of the Anti-Saccharrites, eighteenth-century abolitionists who stopped eating sugar because of its role in the exploitation of people in the colonies.

At the super-local level, think about all the added sugar you ate today and try to cut that in half tomorrow. It's remarkable how easily and insidiously sugar finds its way into everything we eat. For example, in a traditional grocery store, it's very difficult to find bread that doesn't have added sugar in it. So that's an invitation for all of us to rethink how we consume. The boycott still works as a political tool to push back against people who run things. If you don't buy it, what are they going to do?

KD One interesting thing we've done at Burnside Farm is a community cleanse. It's small scale, but for a week we agree to do this cleanse together. It's easy to look at food packaging, and then you start to become aware of what's in your food—it's cleanse as educational experience. People will make a small shift based on what they learn. That's a local, grassroots technique that's worked for me.

Audience When I was in agricultural school, everybody was talking about sustainable agriculture. Right now, we're looking at regenerative agriculture as a way to heal the planet. Something like three hundred local farms working at a small scale can feed large communities of people. Do regenerative agriculture, farmers markets, and CSAs offer enough support directly to farmers that they can actually make a living and continue to feed people into the future?

LP Regenerative is not new—it's super old. A whole generation before the Rodale Institute, considered the start of organic agriculture, there were Black farmers at Tuskegee University in Alabama getting together to learn to farm from George Washington Carver. Carver is probably most famous for his support of the peanut. It's a legume, a magical category of

plants. Turning atmospheric nitrogen into organic nitrogen is what makes agriculture possible. So in the late 1800s, Carver had farmers doing leguminous cover cropping, sheet composting, rotational grazing, and diversified horticulture. These are Indigenous technologies, but he taught them in a university—he was the first to do so—and he called it regenerative farming. This Black farmer in Tuskegee was the father of organic agriculture.

In the next generation, Booker T. Whatley, also a Black farmer at Tuskegee, realized that Black farmers weren't making any money. He said, "Why don't you get out of the mono-crop business? Forget about tobacco and sugar. What you need to do is plant a bunch of fruits and vegetables. Then invite these city folks who are pining for the country out to your farm. They will harvest the food and pay you, and you will call it 'pick your own.'" He had a newsletter so that people felt connected. He had a CSA. A lot of today's co-ops and food hubs come from the Black farming community in the Deep South. These solutions are old, old, old. We need to give credit where it's due, and we need to continue to innovate on the technologies that those who have been closest to the earth have known all along are the right things to do.

ARH You have to consider that the food in our elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, in our prisons, in our hospitals, and in our nursing homes is all connected institutional food. In fact, food that's grown in prisons is sold to schools. Every single prison system in the country has a program where they sell various commodities to the state, and food is one of the central ones. Another thing is Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign. Because of pressure from food companies, it became more about movement and exercise and less about food and actually transforming the food system. That was a real missed opportunity.

LP To add to that, the USDA Food Pyramid—the diagram that recommends what we should eat every day—is driven by the food lobby. The reason it's a cup of milk a day is because of the dairy lobby. The Food Pyramid is not designed for us to do well—it's designed to make sure that we get rid of commodity crops in the appropriate quantities. I appreciate the work of Oldways. This organization has created heritage food pyramids based on traditional Indigenous diets around the world. So there's a Mediterranean food pyramid, an African food pyramid, an Asian food pyramid. In a Black food pyramid, the fundamental thing at the bottom—what you're supposed to eat the most of—is green vegetables. Right above that are tubers and fish. These are our traditional foods, and, for many of us, our bodies are designed to thrive on those cultural foods. ▲