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Abstract

This research documents some of the goals and challenges of refugee farmers and gardeners who participated in an organized agriculture project in Syracuse, New York. During the 2018 harvest season I observed and interviewed nine refugee farmers from Somalia, Bhutan, Nepal, and Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as four organizational staff members who were recruited through their affiliation with the Syracuse Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (SyRAPP) and the Refugee and Immigrants Self-Empowerment (RISE) organization.

Refugee farmers expressed distrust of the conventional food system, they valued control over the food supply through farming, and many desired to live at or near the land they farmed. I map these responses onto the framework of food sovereignty, a strategy which restores power and control of the food system to its producers (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011), in an effort to understand the aspirations of refugees who wish to produce their own food in the US. Immigrant labor and agrarian justice in the US have already been examined as expanding the food sovereignty movement (Brent, Schiavoni, & Alonso-Fradejas, 2015), and I argue that urban and peri-urban refugee farmers in Syracuse also resonate with food sovereignty ideals as they express the desire for increased control over their food systems.

In this work I present possibilities for the refugee agriculture program to imagine goals beyond the limits of neoliberalism; to transform its current emphases on individual responsibility, entrepreneurial ventures, and "alternative" markets into visions of collective empowerment and self-sufficiency outside of the market. To that end, I offer pragmatic recommendations that could incorporate some of food sovereignty's principles and concepts, which I argue the farmers already actively embrace, into its organizational structure.
KEYWORDS: refugees, urban agriculture, food sovereignty, neoliberalism.

“Everybody is scared to eat the food”: Exploring food sovereignty applications in a refugee agricultural program

by

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B.A., University of Portland, 2017

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Finally, I want to acknowledge that this research was conducted on ancestral territory of the Onondaga Nation, and I assume responsibility for respecting Native sovereignty, working toward reparations, and honoring the truth of Indigenous history and culture.

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I. Introduction

Persecution, war, and famine, precipitated by the spread of global capitalism, have led to unprecedented levels of forced displacement. The United Nations Refugee Agency reports that 70.8 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced as of 2019, and of those, 25.9 million people have been granted refugee status in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2019). Despite these large numbers, only 1 in 500 of people who have refugee status were successfully resettled to a third country (the third step after moving from their homelands into refugee camps) in 2018. Meanwhile, anti-immigrant rhetoric in the U.S. has been used to fuel policies and stoke fear, and immigration restrictions have become a focal point of conservative political platforms. According to the U.S. Department of State, the Trump administration has capped the ceiling for resettlement at just 18,000 refugees for fiscal year 2019, the lowest for refugee arrivals since the Refugee Act of 1980 (Krogstad, 2019).

Meanwhile, advocates and refugee service organizations have pushed back against these threats by pointing to statistics and reports which show that refugees drive economic growth, regenerate populations in cities plagued by deindustrialization, and make valuable contributions to cities as entrepreneurs and business owners (New American Economy, 2017). While the existing research around refugees has focused primarily on the importance of economic contributions of immigrants and refugees to host countries, the powerful political-economic and cultural aspects of their resettlement have received far less attention. The experiences of refugee farmers in the U.S. and their alternative food procurement methods have received especially scant attention by academic researchers.

This research contributes an original study about refugee urban food production by highlighting some of the achievements, goals, and challenges of refugees involved in the Syracuse Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (SyRAPP), as they were expressed by nine refugee farmers in their native languages. The aspirations of refugee farmers for participation in the program are compared with those of four organizational staff: the agricultural coordinator of the Refugee and Immigrants Self-Empowerment (RISE), the agricultural educator from Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), the farm manager of the Salt City Harvest Farm (SCHF), and the farmers market manager of the SyRAPP.

Based on preliminary discussions with the organizational staff of RISE, who approached this research with the desired outcome of learning more about how the SyRAPP could better meet farmers' goals, I posed the following three research questions:

1. What are the cultural and organizational barriers refugees face in the SyRAPP program?
2. What are the desires and goals of refugee participants, compared to those of organizational staff?
3. What do these commonalities or differences between participants and staff imply about the functionality and/or success of the program?

Answers to these questions are categorized conceptually and findings are prepared with both academic and practical audiences in mind. As a food studies researcher with a journalism background, I intend for this project to not only contribute an important and unique theoretical analysis, but to also provide some pragmatic applications of the theories for public use. Utilizing the framework of food sovereignty, I argue that refugee agriculture in urban spaces has the potential to be a truly transformative method of food procurement that increases community empowerment through collective action for systems change. Funders, planners, and

organizational staff would benefit from considering the importance of urban agriculture for refugees in host cities beyond individualistic goals of self-empowerment, economic development, and business entrepreneurship.

The SyRAPP program seeks to “provide people from refugee communities classroom and hands-on learning in agriculture production, business planning, marketing mentorship, and ESL to increase food security, create safe spaces for cultural exchange, and provide economic opportunities in Northside Syracuse” (Cornell Cooperative Extension, 2019). The RISE organization is one partner of the SyRAPP which focuses on empowering refugees to achieve economic independence. The SyRAPP recruits refugees for the farming program through RISE. Both urban agriculture and refugee food entrepreneurship have become increasingly embraced by the Syracuse community, as I elaborate upon in the literature review section of this report.

While farmers did not explicitly reference “food sovereignty” in interviews, they expressed many of its principles, including valuing the ability to access land, to control all aspects of the food chain from production to consumption, and to have access to culturally-appropriate and ecologically-grown foods that were sometimes difficult to find in supermarkets.

I examine a program that employed predominantly white organizational staff. While some refugees do sit on the board of directors at the organization, day-to-day administration of the program is conducted by well-intentioned non-refugee employees, which may impact the efficacy of the program’s administration. Refugee participants expressed an array of material benefits from the program, including education about Western techniques and access to farming equipment. However, there are discrepancies between the goals articulated *by* refugee participants and the goals expressed by staff *for* participants.

I urge the program's administrators to consider adopting some of the principles of food sovereignty, which puts power over production into the hands of the people doing the work and pushes back against neoliberal expectations of individual responsibility. In the face of decreased funding for refugee services coming from the federal level, and as federal assistance programs for low-income people are also threatened, food sovereignty might provide a hopeful and radical alternative that allows traditional and culturally-appropriate farming and lifestyle practices to thrive. A condensed executive summary of the study follows so that it is easily accessible for practical reference.

Executive Summary

Overview

In 2019, the US Trump Administration set the ceiling for refugee resettlement at just 18,000 people, the lowest allowed arrival number set by any prior president. The anti-immigrant rhetoric that was once campaign fodder has been actualized into immigration policy that excludes the most vulnerable from seeking asylum in the US. This research counters anti-immigrant narratives by highlighting some valuable agricultural contributions of refugees living in Syracuse, NY to the local food system, and explores possibilities for future refugee agricultural programming to embrace principles of food sovereignty, a framework that places control of the food system into hands of local producers.

This research was conducted with participants and organizational staff from the Refugee and Immigrants Self-Empowerment Organization (RISE) who are involved in the Syracuse Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (SyRAPP). This summary notes the study's theoretical framework and key findings, and makes recommendations for action within the organization based on qualitative research conducted with the organization over a period of three months.

Methods

Interviews and observations were conducted over the course of three months in the Summer of 2018 which included in-depth interviews with 9 refugee farmers and 4 organizational staff members. Participant observation was conducted in the form of volunteer work which included farming and gardening alongside refugee participants. After interviews, relevant

literature regarding refugees, agricultural incubation programs, and food sovereignty was reviewed.

Food sovereignty framework

Food sovereignty is a food studies theory that grew out of the peasant agriculturalist movement Via Campesina, which defined food sovereignty as the right of all people "to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Via Campesina, 2009). The Declaration of Nyéléni (2007) lays out the foundation of food sovereignty's principles, which are consistently referred to by food sovereignty scholars and activists to guide food sovereignty research and implementation. The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty focus on food for the people, valuing food producers, localizing food systems, building knowledge and skills, and working with nature.

In order for food systems to explicitly embrace concepts of food sovereignty, Alkon & Mares (2012) argue that "it is of central importance that food sources are consistent with cultural identities and embedded in community networks" (p. 358). Beyond cultural significance and emphasis on community-based control, food sovereignty also actively resists neoliberalism's emphasis on market-based solutions. This positions the food sovereignty framework as distinct from other food access or local food movements which emphasize projects such as farmers markets and charity-based models. Rather, food sovereignty leverages the power of food producers to control their own food systems.

I then propose an examination of a food program which explicitly embraces food sovereignty in its operations, the Detroit Black Food Security Network, which aims to empower and provide supplies for urban residents of color to take an active role in producing and

controlling their own food. I look to this program as an example of one which the SyRAPP might consider engaging with and using as a model for their own operations.

Main findings

The results of this analysis point to three main findings.

I. Self-sufficiency vs. market-based intentions

Seven out of nine refugee farmers interviewed expressed that their first reason for participating in the program was to grow food for distributing amongst their families and close networks. Market-based intentions such as selling at the farmers market or starting a farming business were recited as a second-priority to feeding themselves and their communities and reducing grocery bills by supplementing with food grown on the farm. Meanwhile, organizational staff largely spoke about the goals for the future of the program in terms of its business and entrepreneurship incubator capabilities.

II. Proximity to food production

The fourth food sovereignty pillar which puts control locally "places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights" (Nyéléni, 2007, p. 39). Living near the site of food production was important to multiple informants who expressed they desired to someday have a house next to the land where they grew food, similar to how they did in their home countries. Participants expressed their desire to control not only their farmland, but the land where they also lived, and farmland was intricately linked to living space. Raising livestock was also an important aspect of food systems control, and was a project that RISE administrators were actively working toward.

III. Building knowledge & skills

The fifth principle of food sovereignty as explained by Nyéléni (2007) is that "food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems…and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering" (p. 39). The RISE program certainly was built on the knowledge and skills of farmers, and because farmers could choose what and how to grow, traditional practices were conserved. Participants were eager to learn how plants grew in the unfamiliar soil and climate conditions. Many noted that the education they received from the program had helped them greatly.

Recommendations

I. **Explore alternatives to solely market-based programming.** RISE might consider the parallels of the responses of farmers in this study with the principles of food sovereignty which elevates the voices of small food producers and supports their rights to determine their own preferred methods of agriculture outside of market influences. To this end, the organizational programming should reflect that the farm space can be used as a place where subsistence growers can thrive and are respected for their decisions not to sell at the market. Staff might engage farmers in conversations which celebrate the contributions self-sufficiency farmers make to a larger political-economic movement which resists the corporate food regime. Providing workshops for sufficiency farmers about food preservation practices such as canning could help to support them in their desires to use the produce they grow for themselves by prolonging its useful life. Access to tillage equipment, seeds, translation services, and educational instruction should be available equitably to farmers regardless of their intentions for farming in the program. SyRAPP

could also incorporate youth education programming at the farm that may help refugees pass on and preserve their cultural food production techniques to future generations.

II. **Explore a more grassroots approach.** Via Campesina (2009) defined food sovereignty as the right of all people "to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and *their right to define their own food and agriculture systems*" (emphasis my own). While RISE does well to allow farmers the freedom to grow what and how they wish, I recommend expanding and protecting the engagement of the refugee community at all stages of the agriculture program's planning, decision-making, and implementation efforts. Refugees need to be the ones who are primarily shaping the direction of the program. That includes adopting principles and procedures which center the people doing the work; those who have the on-the-ground, culturally-relevant, practical agricultural and botanical experience. Their input and inclusion at each stage may prevent future problems with the program's administration. Improving translation services will also help to elevate the voices of farmers. Though translators were employed by RISE in every language spoken by the group, not every language was represented on every day of class or while farming. One possibility for improving the equity and consistency of interpretation services is to provide the option for interpreters to receive accredited training.

III. **Consider alternative land use and support strategies.** Though perhaps idealistic to believe that refugees will be able to live and grow food in close proximity as they did in their home countries with houses on farmland, future programming could explore other ways refugees might connect their desires to produce food close to their living spaces. For example, RISE could look at helping to start or expand existing backyard or at-home

gardens. This may include partnering with people who can perform free or low-cost soil testing to determine whether a backyard/side yard is safe for growing. This could also include helping refugees access vacant lots on which to start their own community gardens and starting a "tool bank" where people who have graduated from the program can still access shared tools to build garden boxes or other agricultural projects. Educational workshops about food preservation techniques may also help support people who wish to prolong their harvest into the cold winter months.

Conclusions

Food sovereignty challenges food security initiatives to look beyond improving the material realities of accessing food for refugees. It actively resists the political-economic forces that cause displacement in the first place – colonialism, the dispossession of land, racial discrimination, and wealth inequality – which have been fueled by capitalism. The SyRAPP could look beyond mere food access questions to engage in more explicitly anti-capitalist programming which would follow food sovereignty's core principles. The farmers in this program articulated numerous goals that I have illuminated through the principles of food sovereignty, and the program could embrace these concepts as a powerful tool for future administration. Namely, the cultural and political-economic values of self-sufficient food production should be considered, rather than solely valuing the economic contributions of refugee labor to the market. This critique goes beyond the level of organizational staff to indicate a necessary cultural and rhetorical shift from funders, planners, and politicians who continue to fund projects based on quantifiable metrics that uphold economic development while undermining other social, political, and health benefits to self-determined food production. RISE could support community empowerment instead of individual empowerment by hosting networking events with other refugees and immigrants,

providing political education to inform refugees of their rights, and using the position of privilege as allies to vocally advocate for policy changes that affect refugees at municipal, state and federal levels. This could be a starting point to help refugees acquire the tools to build relationships to mobilize for wider social and political change down the road.

II. Background Information

Who Are Refugees?

A refugee is defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as someone who has been forced to flee their country of nationality because of a well-founded fear of persecution, war, or violence, and who seeks refuge in a neighboring or resettlement country (UNHCR, 2019). Resettlement is the careful selection by host governments to legally admit refugees who either cannot return home or cannot stay in the developing neighboring countries to which they first fled. To be eligible to be chosen for resettlement by the host country, the refugee must "prove their fear of persecution" and complete a 1 to 3 years-long application and vetting process that includes extensive interviewing, medical exams, and background checks (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018). In 2018, 1 in every 500 refugees in the world were resettled, and an estimated 1 percent of the world's refugees will be resettled during their lifetimes (UNHCR, 2019). Once families or individuals are chosen for resettlement, the U.S. State Department delegates them to resettlement agencies who help secure basic needs and provide case management for the first 30 to 90 days (U.S. Department of State, 2019b). Despite this initial help, however, refugees face complex challenges to obtaining gainful employment, accessing health care, navigating social services, and overcoming language barriers for years after they are resettled.

Refugee Resettlement in Syracuse

In this section I provide an overview of the resettlement landscape in Syracuse with regard to the size and scope of refugee services to set up the story of this research about why refugee farming has immense potential in this area to become a robust operation in the region. Syracuse

is a mid-size, post-industrial city in the center of New York state that has become a preferred location refugee resettlement due to its welcoming reception of refugees, affordability, and access to resettlement services (Miller, L. S., Robinson, J. A., & Cibula, 2016). New York has the third-highest statewide levels of resettlement, after California and Texas, and according to data from the U.S. Department of State's Refugee Processing Center, the City of Syracuse resettled 7,538 refugees between the years 2010 and 2018 (U.S. Department of State, 2019a). A large portion of the population growth in Syracuse since 2008 has been attributed to this influx of refugees; refugees made up over 7 percent of the Syracuse population in 2016 (Baker, 2016), with an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 refugees who are mostly living in the North Side neighborhood (Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 2019). A 2016 study by the New American Economy Research Fund found that the foreign-born Syracuse population reversed depopulation trends in the area between 2004 and 2014 to a 1.8 percent increase in overall population, and 26.2 percent of Syracuse's foreign-born metro population were refugees in 2014 (New American Economy, 2016).

However, the number of new refugees arriving in Syracuse is actually declining, which reflects the ceiling set by the federal government: according to data from the Refugee Processing Center, the number of refugees resettled in Syracuse dropped 72 percent between the 2016 and 2017 fiscal years after the Trump administration took office (U.S. Department of State, 2019a). During fiscal year 2016, the last full year of the Obama administration, the cap was set at 110,000 for new arrivals; in contrast, the Trump administration recently set the ceiling for the 2019 fiscal year at just 18,000 arrivals, the lowest cap ever set by a US president (Shear, 2019).

In other Upstate New York cities such as Utica and Buffalo, the loss of refugee arrivals into the area has had drastic effects. Refugees waiting for family members to join them in their

resettlement communities fear that they may never be reunited. A number of refugee service providers have closed in Buffalo and employers have felt the effects of labor shortages which would normally be filled by refugee workers (Zremski, 2018). To combat the population loss, Syracuse, Utica, and Buffalo have attempted to lure refugees already living in other US cities to Upstate New York with low costs of housing, prevalence of jobs, welcoming reception of refugees by the local community, and the strength of its refugee service agencies (Goldbaum, 2019).

Figure 2 shows the countries of origin and number of arrivals of newly-resettled refugees into Syracuse between the years 2010 and 2018.

Country of Origin	# of refugees
Bhutan	1620
Somalia	1430
Burma	1404
Democratic Republic of Congo	936
Iraq	678
Syria	346
Eritrea	192
Sudan	143
Afghanistan	136
Ukraine	128
Cuba	109
Ethiopia	94
Burundi	85
Central African Republic	74
Pakistan	28
Iran	19
Rwanda	19
Republic of Sudan	16
Uganda	14
Liberia	9
China	8
Moldova	8
Nepal	8

Kazakhstan	6
Ivory Coast	5
Russia	4
Niger	4
Sri Lanka	3
Vietnam	3
Kuwait	2
Yemen	2
Jordan	1
Congo	1
Norway	1
Senegal	1
Thailand	1
Total	7538

Figure 2. Countries of origin and frequencies of all refugees resettled in Syracuse, NY between 2010 and 2018. Based on admissions data from Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System. Figure my own.

In showing the numbers of refugees and places of origin from which refugees in Syracuse have come from, it becomes clear that a farming program aimed at serving the refugee population in Syracuse must grapple with serving multiple cultures, languages, and farming traditions.

Refugee Health in Syracuse

Health care providers and educators have recognized the dire need to understand more about the factors that affect refugees' access to and quality of healthcare services in Syracuse, as their needs are unique among other patients due to histories of trauma, language barriers, and cultural differences surrounding medicine and healthcare (Harris et al., 2014). As access to food procurement methods and diet-related information is important for researchers of health initiatives, this section provides context about the refugee health landscape in Syracuse.

In 2008 the Community Foundation of Western and Central New York launched a Refugee Health Services Task Force which focused on learning more about how refugees accessed primary care, language and translation services barriers, and transportation challenges (Alvarado,

2009). They suggested long and short-term improvements to the refugee health care system, including developing more effective and culturally-appropriate intake protocols, developing medical interpreter training, and creating a clinic in Syracuse solely devoted to refugees for basic health care needs. Following the task force report, in 2011 the Community Foundation of Western and Central New York grant-funded Upstate Medical University to develop the Refugee Clinic at the Pediatric and Adolescent Center, which offers medical care for refugee children during the first two years of resettlement, after which they are incorporated into the broader pediatric clinic at Upstate Medical Center (Paice Froio, 2017). The Refugee Clinic takes in 200 to 250 new patients each year. The universities, which are the city's economic hubs, have also dedicated resources toward understanding refugee concerns. In Spring 2018, professors at Syracuse University and Upstate Medical University developed a community-based Refugee Health Advocacy course that pairs medical and social science college students with the most vulnerable refugee families in Syracuse (Haley, 2018). The course integrates students with refugees to act as case workers and advocates, helping them access resources related to navigating transportation services, social services, health care, and issues with inadequate housing.

Refugee children face unique health challenges in the resettlement process. A study conducted on the impact of resettlement on blood lead levels in children in Syracuse revealed that refugee children in the city suffer substantially from elevated blood lead levels, and half were found to have elevated blood lead levels 3 to 6 months post-resettlement compared to their levels when they first arrived (Lupone et al., 2019). Much of the housing stock in Syracuse was built decades before lead levels in paint were regulated, and refugees are typically resettled in older rental homes that require constant maintenance. Lupone et al. (2019) suggest that harmful

living conditions such as non-compliant landlords and diminishing federal funding for lead abatement programs undermine any behavioral or nutritional lead-exposure education that can be done to curb exposure of refugee children to lead.

Social determinants of health including economic stability, education, social and community participation, health literacy, and environmental conditions all impact refugees' overall health outcomes, and in each of these areas structural inequalities exist that prevent the access to and quality of services. Paul Farmer (1996) famously coined the idea of structural violence to describe the harm and suffering that is caused and obscured by inequalities in the health care system. Grace et. al (2018) take Farmer's concept further by terming the "violence of uncertainty" which captures the effects immigration policies are having on immigrant and refugees' willingness to seek out medical attention. They assert that immigration policies are "harming people's mental and physical health," creating a "vicious cycle that plays out partly in the health care system; policies of uncertainty enact the violence of uncertainty" (Grace et al., 2018, p. 904). As refugees and immigrants are targeted for deportation for minor infractions, including in hospitals, on public transit, and in social service clinics, research has shown that they are deterred from seeking education and health care.

Refugee Food Insecurity

There is a limited body of research about the food security of refugees and asylees in particular, but existing literature on immigrants' food security has shown that foreign-born people in the US, especially those families with children, are at greater risk of food insecurity than the native-born population (Food Research & Action Center, 2016). The United Nations Council on World Food Security defined food security as "the ability for all people, at all times, to have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets

their food preference and dietary needs for an active and healthy life" (IFPRI, 2019). When these conditions are not met, a person is considered to be food insecure. Research shows that foreign-born individuals, and those working in the food production sector particularly, experience higher rates of food insecurity than their native-born counterparts. A study on food insecurity among migrant and seasonal farmworkers in California revealed that 47 percent were food insecure (Minkoff-Zern, 2012), and a study of 36 migrant and seasonal farmworker families in North Carolina found that 63.8 percent were food insecure (Bore et al., 2010).

Refugees face unique food-related concerns, as many have experienced trauma in their homelands or in refugee camps that could affect their perceptions of diet and hunger (Food Research & Action Center, 2016). Data about the rate of food insecure refugees is incomplete; however, one 2007 study of 101 refugees in the U.S. found that 56 percent were food insecure, with difficulty shopping for groceries and accessing food stamp benefits increasing the severity of food insecurity (Hadley et al., 2007). Food insecurity decreased the longer refugees had been in the U.S.; 73 percent of refugees who had been resettled for one year or less indicated food insecurity, while those who had been living in the U.S. for three years or more indicated food insecurity in 33 percent of cases (Hadley et al., 2007). This is compared to 11.8 percent of households that were food insecure nationally in 2017 (USDA ERS, 2018). Despite refugees in the sample becoming employed after resettlement, one-third of informants were still food insecure after three or more years in the U.S., suggesting that "reliance on employment as the sole indicator of success in the resettlement process may be too narrow an indicator," and that future research should focus more broadly on different indicators of health and well-being (Hadley et al., 2007, p. 411). Employment should not be seen as the end goal of refugee

resettlement programs; other factors contributing to the resettlement process, including socialization and community support, should also be prioritized.

The "healthy immigrant effect" is now a well-established phenomenon among academics who research refugee resettlement. Research has found that many migrants to countries in the global north have superior health outcomes compared to the native-born population, but within 10 to 20 years their health status converges with that of the native-born population (Markides & Rote, 2019, p. 205). This has been attributed to the adoption of health behaviors of the host country, discrimination, physically demanding jobs, stress, and substandard healthcare. A study of prenatal outcomes in Syracuse confirmed the healthy immigrant effect in refugee mothers and found that infants born to women from refugee countries and other mothers who were foreign-born were half as likely to have preterm births than native-born women (Miller et al., 2016). A number of studies have documented the declining health of immigrants the longer they reside in the host country, which may point to the challenges that this population faces navigating the highly-industrialized U.S. food system and accessing food and other financial assistance programs (Chilton et al., 2009). Studies have found substantial anti-poverty and anti-hunger benefits of financial assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women Infants and Children (WIC), and Medicaid (FRAC, 2017) for those who live in poverty, and federal policies which limit access to financial safety net programs may negatively affect the abilities of children to develop and thrive physically and cognitively.

Syracuse Refugee Food Entrepreneurship

Refugees are an integral part of the Syracuse food landscape, and initiatives that promote refugees to produce, sell, and serve food to the greater Syracuse population have gained support in recent years. To understand the gardening and farming entrepreneurship efforts, it is helpful to

also understand the other parts of the food production and distribution landscape in Syracuse.

The North Side of Syracuse, a historically immigrant neighborhood where many refugee service agencies are located, has become a popular location for refugee- and immigrant-focused small businesses, including restaurants, food markets, and culinary training programs. With the influx of refugees resettled to the North Side in recent years, the neighborhood has undergone a changing food and retail landscape in an area that was once predominantly inhabited by European immigrants. A new food hall known as the Salt City Market is slated to open in fall 2020, with food stalls dedicated to showcasing foods made by refugee and immigrant chefs with "culinary options as diverse as our city" (Salt City Market, 2019). "Taste the world" pop-up dinner events and a culinary workforce training program for refugees and immigrants have become hugely successful among city residents in recent years. Beyond the scope of restaurants and teaching kitchens, refugees in Syracuse also run their own catering businesses, both formally and informally. The sharing and exchange of both fresh produce and prepared foods occurs informally, oftentimes facilitated through online marketplaces.

Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP)

There is a broad network of refugee and immigrant service organizations in Syracuse, including but not limited to the Refugee and Immigrants Self-Empowerment (RISE), Inter Faith Works, Catholic Charities of Onondaga County, and Hopeprint. All programs step in for the state to provide various programming directed toward resettlement. RISE has been a recipient of the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP) grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a nearly $100,000 three-year grant which has been used to build a farming and gardening program for refugees.

In 2008 the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) established the RAPP grants to support collaborations between non-profit organizations, state agricultural extension offices, and resettlement agencies to help meet the nutritional, social, and economic needs of refugees. 2011 was the first year of a three-year grant cycle for 14 refugee service agencies in states around the country; in 2016 the ORR administered 15 more RAPP grants to new agencies, and in fiscal year 2019, 15 organizations either had the grant renewed for an additional three years or received the RAPP grant for the first time. The grants are allocated in amounts of a maximum of $100,000, and during fiscal year 2019 each eligible organization received at least $90,000. The grant is for a three-year term and is meant to establish or continue supporting agricultural programs for refugees, which are largely run by non-governmental refugee service organizations. Renewal of the grant is dependent upon the organization's ability to prove the value of the program to the ORR, which has largely to do with the program's contribution to refugees' economic self-sufficiency.

Improving refugees' economic self-sufficiency has become a target initiative of refugee social service organizations, and the ORR has taken steps to address concerns of refugee economic self-sufficiency through three creative workforce development programs: agricultural incubation, microenterprise development, and individual development (adult savings) accounts (Halpern, 2008). These programs are economically-focused, and are promoted as pathways for refugees to earn money, obtain economic self-sufficiency, and to ultimately curb their reliance on social services. The agricultural incubation programs have emerged with increasing frequency among resettlement agencies as a way to accomplish many goals: increase access to fresh foods, facilitate cultural exchanges, increase refugees' economic self-sufficiency, and integrate refugees into the local host community.

The RAPP is animated primarily by food-related and economic development concerns. In a description of RAPP on the Office of Refugee Resettlement website, project goals include “the creation of: sustainable income, supplemental income, an adequate supply of healthy food, and better physical and mental health” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Health-promotion and income-generation are primary goals of the RAPP program, and emphasis on self-sufficiency both economically and of the healthy body is a major motivating factor in the development and implementation of the RAPP model. In a 2016 Department of Health and Human Services report about RAPP, elements of a successful RAPP included marketing, improving client economic opportunities, community food security, partnerships, and client recruitment and orientation.

Conclusion

Examining immigrant and refugee gardens and farms through the lens of the broader refugee health and business landscapes provides a basis for understanding some of the health-related and market-related challenges which the RAPP strives to address through its urban agriculture programs. Refugee farm incubation programs have seen a marked increase in momentum and support among city officials, universities, foundations, civil society, and everyday consumers. It is important to critically question the goals and motives of these programs from an organizational standpoint as compared to the needs and ambitions of the refugees who are the people doing the labor required of the program.

In Chapter 3 I examine the framework guiding this research in four conceptual sections: 1) Neoliberalism, Resettlement, and Empowerment; 2) Neoliberalism and Urban Agriculture; 3) Food Sovereignty; and 4) Refugee Agricultural Programs.

III. Literature Review

Four emergent groups of literature relate to this project and provide a basis for the argument for a food sovereignty-focused refugee agricultural program. The groupings of relevant literature that informed this research included scholarship on 1) Neoliberalism, Resettlement, and Empowerment; 2) Neoliberalism and Urban Agriculture; 3) Food Sovereignty; and 4) Refugee Agricultural Programs.

Neoliberalism

David Harvey (2005) describes neoliberalism as a political economic philosophy which elevates capitalism and "values market exchange as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs" (Harvey 2005, p. 3). Neoliberalism is the intensification of capitalism, which Karl Marx famously characterized as the division of labor between the capitalist and working classes which exploits labor power in order to extract profit (Marx, 1996). In 1935, the US government took responsibility for the intense economic ills brought on by the Great Depression and a national welfare system was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the New Deal through the Social Security Act of 1935, and for the next several decades the U.S. government experimented with these Keynesian welfare policies, taking responsibility for citizens who were unemployed, widows, the elderly poor, and the disabled. Critics of the welfare state grew, however, and by the 1970s a new system of political, social, and economic principles was embraced which diminished responsibilities of the state to provide welfare for its citizens and instead maximized the power of market forces to regulate society. Welfare has now become predominantly the responsibility of charities,

churches, and non-profit organizations who have "rolled-out" social programming to make up for the state's "roll-back" of public welfare supports.

Neoliberalism works by trusting the market to meet the needs of human beings, rather than relying on government regulations to control the market, thereby shifting regulatory control from the state to market mechanisms (Harvey, 2005, p. 71). As a result of loosened federal regulations that came with the rise of neoliberal policies, a number of global problems have developed which have resulted in the forced displacement of peoples from their homelands. Philip McMichael (2005) is one of the foremost development scholars on the global problems related to food and agriculture which have arisen as a result of the neoliberal regime. At the heart of these problems is the displacement and decimation of peasant livelihoods due to corporate food globalization. Trade liberalization, or a loosening of the restrictions on free trade, combined with the dumping of Northern food surpluses onto the Global South, has undermined peasant food production and self-sufficiency (McMichael, 2005). Food dumping is precipitated by the industrialized production of food by corporate food regimes, which produces food in such extreme amounts that it must look elsewhere for markets. The Global South is seen as the perfect potential market for that excess food. As local economies become dependent upon those imports for survival, and as land is taken from farmers by food corporations to use as production sites, the displacement of peasant farmers and small food producers has occurred at massive rates. The neoliberal policies which encourage international exports have undermined the value of small farmers, decimated rural livelihoods, and have led to the Global South's reliance on foreign inputs for survival, consequently solidifying the massive power of multinational corporations (McMichael, 2005).

Neoliberalism is an ideology that relies on the mechanisms of capitalism to succeed, which at its basic definition involves exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class to benefit off the profit which workers produce with their labor power. Capitalism promotes competition and individualism, and creatively undermines the ability of the working class to organize for collective political action. The decimation of peasant livelihoods forces those who once lived self-sufficiently as peasant farmers to engage in capitalism as workers who can only earn their livings by working for the capitalist, who owns the means of production. Globalization has forced peasant farmers to find off-farm income and abandon their agrarian traditional ways of production, therefore contributing to the reproduction of capitalist labor relations. La Via Campesina arose as a way to combat neoliberal globalization by protecting the peasant agrarian economy.

Entrepreneurship and engagement as a consumer in the market is central to neoliberal governmentality's principles. Neoliberal governmentality "installs in society a concept of human subject as autonomous, individualized, self-directed decision-making agent who becomes an entrepreneur of one self; a human capital" (Turken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2016, p. 33). Neoliberal subjectivities are self-governing, self-regulating social actors whose successes and failures are dependent upon their engagement in the domain of the market (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism in the US promotes entrepreneurship, competition, hard work, and consumerism as the means to achieving the "American Dream." Neoliberalism "redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency" (Monbiot, 2016). The privatization of public goods has exacerbated issues of poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity as a result of intentional political decisions that have privileged the free market and individual consumerism. Political

economists argue that neoliberal governmentality keeps single mothers, people of color, and other vulnerable populations at disproportionately higher risk for poorer health overall, as quality services are only accessible to those who are born into privileged classes.

Neoliberalism in Urban Agriculture

Many scholars have critiqued urban agriculture and community gardening projects as reproducing the goals of neoliberalism. Urban agriculture is increasingly considered by some city planners, academics, and activists as an important factor in creating just and sustainable cities, and the benefits of urban agriculture have been widely noted. However, many scholars have made connections between urban agriculture's articulations with neoliberal aims. A number of food studies scholars have exposed urban agriculture as implicit in the ongoing neoliberalism project, even if they articulate with social justice values. Weissman (2012) examines the neoliberal motivations of diverse urban agricultural projects in Brooklyn, concluding that "both for-profit and not-for-profit urban farms emerge within a dialectical relationship with a capitalist political economy in ways that shape their political possibilities" (p. 101). Weissman and others urge a critical focus on the "inherent" political qualities of urban agriculture. Agricultural projects have been critiqued as operating from a neoliberal governance structure that is focused on individual empowerment and personal responsibility (Pudup, 2008; Ogawa, 2009; Weissman, 2012), as quasi-state and non-state actors lead "underprivileged" people on a pathway toward transformation by working the land. Pudup (2008) suggests that since the rise of neoliberalism, organized agricultural projects known popularly as "community gardens" have been presented as a method of cultivating neoliberal citizen-subjects out of populations deemed at-risk in response to social crises associated with the roll-back and roll-out of neoliberal policies.

Importantly, Pudup's critical approach to organized garden projects makes the distinction between the postwar era form of communal gardening projects, which focused on the garden as a site of social resistance, and the organized garden projects of today, which are focused primarily on transforming individual character or responsibility. Whereas communal gardening space originated out of collective efforts to mobilize for social change, she argues that contemporary garden projects are animated by neoliberal and bootstrap ideologies of personal responsibility, rather than grassroots-led movements for justice. Pudup states that "the agents of neoliberal roll-out gardening technologies…are less neighborhoods rising up to reclaim their communities and resist their marginalization and rather more a variety of non-state and quasi-state actors who deliberately organize gardens to achieve a desired transformation of individuals in place of collective resistance and/or mobilization" (p. 1230).

Alkon (2012; 2017) directs attention to the racial and class inequalities reproduced by urban agricultural projects, addressing both the strengths and weaknesses of alternative food movements as approaches to social justice. Alkon's research on urban farms in Oakland, CA reveals that food movements may exacerbate inequalities through advancing gentrification that may change the character of a place and displace lower-income and residents of color.

Long before urban agriculture was on the radar of white alternative food movement activists and neighborhood revitalization enthusiasts, people of color in the U.S. utilized urban agriculture as a method of resistance and survival through agricultural cooperatives during the Civil Rights era, which played integral roles in strengthening Black communities. Reynolds and Cohen's *Beyond the Kale* (2016) highlights people of color who have been at the front lines of utilizing urban agriculture to reclaim space, resist marginalization, and mobilize for racial and social justice. They argue that the many benefits attributed to urban farming such as education,

green space, and food access may obscure structural inequalities as they avoid the work of dismantling oppressive systems of race, wealth, and gender inequities. Reynolds and Cohen (2016) identify some projects which they see as taking actionable steps towards using urban agriculture to effect truly "substantive social change," through their explicitly anti-racist priorities to dismantle systems of oppression.

Slocum (2006) and Guthman (2008; 2014) have also interrogated the whiteness and color blindness that pervades contemporary alternative food movements. Slocum notes the white privilege that is reproduced through alternative food movements as it actively avoids engaging in anti-racism work out of fear of losing the support of allies (2006). Guthman has also critiqued white-led alternative food movements, including urban gardening programs (2008) and organic agriculture (2014). Guthman's study of her students' experiences engaging in urban garden programming in urban food deserts revealed that her students, the "food activists," were disappointed in the lack of interest from the mostly African American participants in the programs, stating that residents simply wanted the anonymity and convenience of buying food in grocery stores, which conflicted with what alternative food activists wanted for them (2008, p. 443). Ultimately, even those projects which testify against neoliberalism to varying degrees still generally operate within its confines (Ogawa, 2009).

Neoliberal notions of empowerment in refugee resettlement

The notion of "empowerment" features prominently as a positive approach in health promotion literature (Spencer, 2015), women's rights discourse (Calves, 2009), international development approaches (Betts et al., 2016), and in non-profit mission statements. "Empowerment" is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights" ("Empowerment",

2019). “Empowerment” was originally used by women’s rights movements in the mid-twentieth century as a means of asserting power, but has since been criticized as promoting markedly neoliberal economic development initiatives which encourage bootstraps individualism. Going hand-in-hand with empowerment rhetoric is a body of literature about encouraging “entrepreneurship” as a tool for refugees to engage in their new homelands (Marchand & Dijkhuizen, 2018). However, some have argued that that the buzzword “empowerment,” when used to articulate principles of individual economic responsibility, may obscure other important definitions of empowerment which do not prioritize job readiness and work ethic (Dykstra-Devette, 2018, p. 179).

Aradhana Sharma (2008) examines a women’s empowerment program in India and argues that empowerment has effectively replaced the concept of *welfare* in the contemporary neoliberal era and is used by a variety of organizations and governments to motivate the socioeconomically marginalized in society to confidently rise up, take the reins, and overcome bureaucratic obstacles. Empowerment initiatives may “articulate with neoliberal principles” (Sharma, 2008, p. xviii), promoting markedly neoliberal ideologies of individualism and reliance on the market as panaceas for social problems.

According to Anne-Emmanuele Calves’ (2009) history of empowerment as a concept, it began as a critique of foreign aid programs, which had privileged economic development as the benchmark of success. The use of “empowerment” was intended to promote a more holistic version of development which saw people not as objects of development, but as subjects. Calves makes note of empowerment’s contemporary usage: “Generally used in combination with other fashionable terms, such as ‘community,’ ‘civil society,’ and ‘agency,’ the idea of empowerment is now at the heart of the rhetoric of the ‘participation of the poor’ in development” (p. 735). The

participation of the poor in development is a markedly neoliberal approach that encourages poor people to engage in personal transformation, as if their conditions in the first place were self-imposed (Monbiot, 2017).

The World Bank first mentioned empowerment in its publication *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty* as one of three strategies for eradicating poverty, alongside the terms "opportunity" and "security" (Calves, 2009, p. 751). John Patrick Leary (2018) points out in *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism* (2018) that empowerment as a concept has been turned on its head: what once had its origins in leftist camps of thought such as African American civil rights discourse, feminist theory, post-colonial development, and social work has been co-opted into marketing slogans by the very institutions it set out to critique. Similar to the concept of sustainability, Leary argues that empowerment now serves as a neoliberal tool to cover-up the inequalities produced by capitalism. For example, empowerment rhetoric has been used with particularly high reference to women's rights, but empowerment's focus on individual access to services and choice obscures the opportunity for women to collectively organize around political struggles to gain power (Calves, 2009, p. 759).

A small body of research has critiqued the rhetorical implications of empowerment, and fewer have critiqued its usage by refugee resettlement agencies. A notable exception is Grace Spencer (2015), who interrogates the notion of empowerment as it is used in health promotion though a case study of teenagers and suggests that scholars should consider "unpacking the normative assumption that empowerment unproblematically promotes health, without attention to the ways in which empowerment may also result in less-determined outcomes, with some potentially troubling ethical consequences" (p. 209).

Another critique of the neoliberal rhetoric of empowerment used by refugee resettlement agencies come from Sarah Steimel (2017), who found that the organizational staff of such agencies mobilized discourse of self-determination when they focused on self-sufficiency, but in practice, their use of self-sufficiency was constructed in economic terms. In contrast, refugee clients "constructed empowerment in economic, educational, personal, and family terms" (p. 90). Steimel (2017) suggested changing the structure of funding so that service organizations are not "forced to equate self-determination with 'getting any job,'" and instead can focus on other factors that refugees themselves find important in the family assessment and goal-planning process (p. 104).

Tiffany Dykstra-Devette (2018) also argues the importance of challenging the neoliberal communication that emerges in the resettlement rhetoric of refugee empowerment initiatives. They argue that empowerment rhetoric which promotes a community-centered approach and privileges refugees as experts in their own empowerment, rather than empowerment rooted in independent economic stability, may more effectively address the barriers that refugees face to resettlement. Dykstra-Devette (2018) describes one project which they see as centering refugees as experts in their own resettlement:

> The GRA accomplishes this by funding programs like the "Goat Project," which simultaneously unites Somali refugees through volunteerism, brings in income through goat-related products and services, and provides the community with halal meat and dairy. Through organizational practices that rely on refugee voices to increase the interdependence of communities, strengthen activities that provide a space for dialogue, and meet the material needs of newly resettled refugees, empowerment could be

> redefined and reprioritized in ways that resist neoliberal notions of successful resettlement (p. 189).

In this study I make connections of these critiques of “self-empowerment” with a refugee agricultural program, suggesting that a food sovereignty approach to empowerment that emphasizes collective empowerment over self-empowerment may be a powerful rhetorical tool for refugees to organize for power.

Food sovereignty and urban agriculture in the US

As a pushback against neoliberal development and the consequent displacement of peasant farmers due to the corporate food regime, the food sovereignty movement has emerged as a radical strategy of resistance. The food sovereignty movement, united as the International Peasant’s Movement La Via Campesina, strongly opposes corporate food regimes and resists land grabs from multinational companies and participation in industrialized food markets. Food sovereignty restores power and control back into the hands of the food producers (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011), and it takes a particular interest in protecting the rights of women food producers and others who are marginalized by gender. Food sovereignty has been positioned as an opposite approach to food security because it extends beyond merely increasing access to food – which could be temporarily met through short-term band-aid interventions such as charity and emergency food aid – to “make connections between the rights and responsibilities of producers and consumers to determine the content and character of the food system” (Trauger, 2014, p. 1136).

The Declaration of Nyéléni (2007), a set of principles developed from a forum of world leaders, food producers, and activists of the food sovereignty movement, lays out the foundation of food sovereignty’s principles, which are consistently referred to by food sovereignty scholars

and activists to guide food sovereignty research and implementation. The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty include: 1) Focuses on Food for People; 2) Values Food Producers; 3) Localizes Food Systems; 4) Puts Control Locally; 5) Builds Knowledge and Skills; and 6) Works with Nature.

While food sovereignty is rooted in international peasant livelihoods, some scholars and activists have examined its usage in relation to under-resourced US urban areas. Alkon & Mares (2012) map food sovereignty onto two alternative food projects in Oakland and Seattle and find that food sovereignty cannot truly be embraced in these movements unless those movements are able to acknowledge and resist neoliberalism. They contend that, among frameworks for alternative food including community food security and food justice, "only the food sovereignty approach remains focused on opposition to neoliberalism and transformation of the corporate food regime" (Alkon & Mares, 2012, p. 349). In order for a project to embody food sovereignty's ideals, food activists should "move beyond questions of access to a more comprehensive focus on entitlements to land, decision-making, and control over natural assets" (2012, p. 358). Mares found that the Latino/a population in Seattle was largely excluded from alternative food movements and, when included, the agricultural knowledge of those communities were marginalized because of the market-based constraints of neoliberalism (p. 358).

Questions of land use and tenure policies frequently appear throughout the literature on food sovereignty as a critical component of the framework, especially for urban spaces where land use is continually threatened by neoliberal ideologies which prioritize exchange values over use values (Hachmyer, 2017, p. 120). The vulnerability of land used for urban agriculture, bureaucratic barriers to owning land, and threats of gentrification all pose tenuous land access

scenarios. Hachmeyer (2017) asserts that "the potential for an overall shift of power through a shift in access to and ownership of resources – particularly in post-industrial cities and neighborhoods where vacant lot abounds – is promising" (p. 120).

Hoover (2013) uses critical race theory to highlight the racial inequalities that urban agriculture can reproduce, and ultimately urges a movement toward sovereignty that confronts issues of race as they relate to land tenure. They argue that movements toward food sovereignty, rather than merely food access, center communities of color and ask what they themselves desire for food production. Hoover urges that "knowledge about land-access policies need to be studied in order to gain a fuller picture of *who* is gaining access to city land, and *how* they are doing it" (p. 113).

In one of the most comprehensive books to date about food sovereignty *Public Policies for Food Sovereignty* (Desmarais et al., 2017), the benefits and contradictions of a state-led food sovereignty movement are explored by a collection of authors. While food sovereignty is claimed as the most radical of alternative food movements thus far, some scholars have warned against institutionalizing state-led food sovereignty for fear that it may hinder the movement rather than help it. As with the organic agriculture movement, they argue that state intervention and adoption of social movements may lead to the very top-down control the sovereignty movement actively resists (p. 10). However, a number of contributions from this book highlight the possibilities for utilizing food sovereignty as a framework for transformative change in urban areas if implemented correctly.

Trauger (2014) is one scholar who examines food sovereignty and its potential to work in various ways "within, against and in between powers of the sovereign liberal state" by reframing land use rights and allowing exchanges of food outside of the regulated market. Trauger (2014)

asserts that food sovereignty "targets transnational capital directly and, by extension, the state-based policies that promote it…It makes connections between the rights and responsibilities of producers and consumers to determine the content and character of the food system" (2014, p. 1136).

From this overview of scholarship about food sovereignty, three main points arise consistently as central tenets of the framework: first, food sovereignty hinges greatly upon the ability of food producers to not only access vacant land, but to have control over that land to use in ways that are self-determined. The second principle that is consistently agreed upon by scholars studying food sovereignty is the rights of people to self-determination over their food system, meaning they are not privy to the demands of the market when deciding what and how to produce their food. Third, food sovereignty ensures the ability to grow food for self-sufficiency, which resists reliance on the corporate food regime in order to live.

Refugee agricultural programs

Food studies and related fields have focused significantly on urban agriculture as a site of research. Scholarship about the effects of agricultural programs on resettled refugees is still limited. Clatworthy et al. (2013) have studied gardening's potential for mental health intervention, calling for more robust research in the field. Harris et al. (2014) found that community gardening contributed to greater feelings of social connectedness and community engagement among African refugees. Hartwig and Mason (2016) found that community gardens served as valuable spaces of health promotion for refugees and immigrants, who reported benefitting from the gardens in the form of healing for their anxiety and depression. Hadley & Sellen (2007) have found that refugees are vulnerable to food insecurity at alarmingly high rates and they suggest that more effort should be focused on measuring the health and well-being of

refugees after resettlement as determinants of success, beyond merely viewing employment as the primary indicator of success.

Entress et al. (2018) explore not only how refugees access, prepare and eat food, but also how local government and civil society groups are helping refugees access food in Buffalo. They recommend RAPP as a model to consider introducing into the region. The majority of scholarship about refugees' engagements in urban agriculture has to do with identity formation (Griffin, 2017), place making (Strunk & Richardson, 2017), and entrepreneurship enterprises (Gonzales et al., 2013). Griffin (2017) asserts that the connections between farming and refugees' sense of place is valuable to the construction of their identities in new host areas and urges refugee farming programs to be expanded and protected. Strunk & Richardson's (2017) study shows the possibility of refugee agriculture to promote identity and belonging not through an organized program, but through vacant land that the refugee population has managed and cared for themselves.

Importantly, Tardiff (2015) examined the Salt City Harvest Farm, the same location as this study but before SyRAPP had partnered with RISE, which revealed that refugee and immigrant farmers at the community farm had "rich agricultural backgrounds and extensive botanical knowledge," and that the SCHF would "best suit their interests by continuing to be a place to grow their own food (rather than transitioning into an incubator model)" (p. iii). One key observation from Tardiff was that "the SCHF stands apart in its unique emphasis on communal cultivation and cross-cultural exchange" (p. iii), during a time when so many community farms were transitioning to farm business training incubators. At the time, the SCHF was not producing for the market, and instead farmers took home or donated what they grew. This research expands on Tardiff's findings from 2015 and presents a new framework, that of food sovereignty, for

examining farmers' experiences in the agriculture program and as a framework for going a step further to apply food sovereignty's principles to the operations of the SyRAPP.

Conclusion

To date, my review of the literature has revealed a scholarly gap that connects refugees who were formerly-peasant farmers, who are also engaged in urban agriculture in the US, with the framework of food sovereignty. Thus, I situate my study within the bodies of literature mentioned here to make a unique academic contribution which explores how refugees articulate with food sovereignty ideals in an urban farming and gardening program. In the following chapter I explain the methods of study including methodological strategies, research challenges, and positionality.

IV. Methods

The methods of this study were qualitative and involved review by the Institutional Review Board, volunteer work, one-on-one interviews, and participant observation. Institutional review board approval was obtained through the Syracuse University Office of Research Integrity and included consent documents translated into all three languages of the interviewees. Volunteer work, which included farming and gardening alongside refugee participants for five weeks prior to starting interviews, was meant to develop rapport with farmers and staff. The volunteer work was also done to gain an intimate, bodily understanding of the farming experience and to gain knowledge of the crops that were grown.

Informants – sample of refugee farmers and organizational staff

In total, thirteen (13) informants were interviewed for the study, including four (4) refugee garden program participants, five (5) refugee farm program participants, and four (4) organizational staff members. This research was limited in sample size by the number of refugees and staff who were involved in the SyRAPP, and by practical constraints such as time and financial resources of the researcher. With limited sampling and data, these results may not be generalizable beyond the case presented, however Stake (2006, p. 8) asserts that "the power of case study is in its attention to the local situation, not in how it represents other cases in general."

All refugee informants for the study were recruited by RISE, as they were enrolled participants in the RISE SyRAPP program prior to this study. Refugees had homelands in Somalia, Bhutan, Nepal, and Democratic Republic of the Congo. Refugee farmers and gardeners in the program were reminded on multiple occasions that speaking with me would be optional, and that they would be compensated 50 dollars in the form of a VISA giftcard if they chose to

partake in interviews. I attempted to be very intentional about communicating with refugee participants that whether they opted into or out of the study would not hinder their participation in the SyRAPP program. Farmers were given IRB-approved consent documents prior to interviews which stated that they had the option to opt in or out of having their real, full names published; every farmer consented to having their real names published.

Organizational staff members were recruited based on their positions in or related to the RISE organization. I spoke with four members involved in the SyRAPP and the SCHF, who all consented to being named: RISE agricultural coordinator Brandy Colebrook, Cornell Cooperative Extension farm educator Kayo Green, Brady Faith Farms manager and the marketing mentor for SyRAPP Jessi Lyons, and Salt City Harvest Farms farm manager Graham Savio. Staff were informed that they would not be compensated financially for their interviews.

My decision to forgo anonymization of interviewees was intentional because farmers might benefit from having their experiences in the program, including their successes as farmers, published for future reference. Because farmers were not asked about personally sensitive information, I did not find anonymization necessary to maintain ethical research standards in this case. This community-based research was intended to give a voice to refugee farmers in Syracuse and to do so in a way that might give them agency over this project. Therefore, I wanted to provide an option of non-anonymity for those who wanted to speak about their experiences in this way. There were a number of farmers who were attempting to start their own businesses and farms, and this research might help to bolster their professional portfolios.

Data collection

I received Institutional Review Board Expedited Protocol (see Appendix) approval on August 3, 2018, and formally closed the study from further research data collection activities in

June 2019. Participants were asked to sign informed consent forms which had been translated into the three languages of farmers: Nepali, Swahili, and Somali. The RISE office helped to secure the translations of the consent documents.

I approached the SyRAPP without having prior experience or relationships with the employees, the farmers involved in SyRAPP, or with their partner organizations. I drove my own vehicle to the farm and garden once to three times per week. On most days at the farm I was working alongside farmers; at the garden, I was mostly observing and taking notes. I carried a notebook with me the first day at the farm but quickly realized I would need to write up notes afterward instead so I could devote my full attention to the tasks at hand. I volunteered alongside farmers for five weeks, mostly in the farms and gardens, before approaching them about interviews, so as to understand some of their lived experiences on the farm. Refugee participants welcomed me into their farm rows and showed me how to plant seeds at the beginning of the season, harvest produce at the end of the season, and pull weeds throughout. My farming experience and knowledge prior to helping at the farm was very limited; this helped me to assess to what extent I myself learned from the classes that were taught. I built rapport during the initial five weeks on the farm and had worked alongside each farmer at least once before interviewing them, so they recognized me, and I got to know basic information about them before interviews began. I kept a notebook in my car so that I could write down any immediate reactions in my field notes, and other notes I wrote up as soon as I could after the farm visit.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine refugee farm participants and four people who are involved in the farm's organizational administration. Interviews took place on the Salt City Harvest Farm, where the land for the SyRAPP was located; the Brady Faith Farm, a community farm where the SyRAPP market manager was also a manager; the Lodi Street

community garden, where the SyRAPP's first-year gardeners learned how to garden; at the RISE office, where the agricultural coordinator had her office; and in a coffee shop in Syracuse. Interviews were recorded by digital audio recorder, when permissible by research subjects, which was in all cases. Interviews lasted approximately 20 to 60 minutes each. Three interpreters, one of each who spoke Nepali, Swahili, and Somali, were employed by RISE and interpreted the interviews. Participants could opt out of using an interpreter if they wished to conduct the interview in English, but the interpreter was still present at the interview for any clarifications. The interpreters were given a reimbursement of 20 dollars per hour, which is the amount RISE suggested I compensate them because it is the rate at which their organization paid them. I was able to compensate interpreters and refugees for their interviews with money that was secured by a grant fund from the Upstate Medical University Consortium on Culture and Medicine. The same fund was used to pay interviewees a rate of 50 dollars per interview. The amount of 50 dollars per interview was agreed upon by the RISE agriculture coordinator, the researcher, and the principle investigator on this project, and was determined to be a fair reimbursement for the time that was taken from the refugees' normal working hours.

Organizational staff were not paid for their interviews because they occurred during working hours. Interviews with farm organizational staff did not include an interpreter because these informants spoke proficient English. Farm program organizational staff were interviewed about their backgrounds, goals for the future of the program, barriers they faced as the program had progressed over the past several years, and what they sought to learn about the participants through this study.

Interviews with farmers occurred at the farm during working hours; this was not how the research was originally planned, but after volunteering for five weeks prior to starting the

interviews, it was determined that interviews conducted while working on the farm could provide valuable information about the methods and techniques used while farming, and may also help farmers to describe details about the plants and farming methods that could not be as easily described in a more private environment. Additionally, there was a small window of availability many participants had outside of their time at the farm, and many farmers were only able to get to the farm once to twice per week for three hours each session when the RISE organization's van was able to take them. Because of this, I did not want to take away their valuable farming time, so I assured interviewees they were welcome to keep weeding, harvesting, and planting while we talked. I asked questions regarding their experiences both inside and outside the United States, and about their perceived challenges and benefits with the program.

In total, the field work for this project was conducted for approximately 10 weeks during the months of June, July and August.

Coding, data analysis, and interpretation

Interviews were transcribed from digital files onto a password-protected computer. The data analysis software ATLAS.ti was used to help organize interviews for coding, from which key terms or ideas were organized thematically. To interpret the data, I identified the prominent words, phrases, and ideas to develop themes for the findings. I then used the foundational literature about food sovereignty, urban agriculture, neoliberalism, empowerment, and resettlement to draw connections from the data to prior published scholarship. My interpretation of the data is not innocent of my biases and hopes for this project.

Methodological Challenges

Challenges Interviewing with Interpreters

A number of challenges arose in the research process due to the constraints of scheduling with three different interpreters, and the differing capabilities of each interpreter. Interpreters were not always present at farm or gardening sessions. Some days they would show up later than I had been able to stay, and other days they were unable to make it to the farm for various reasons. The interpreters worked other, full-time jobs, and because the farm was 20-30 minutes from the city, they were constrained by their available time. Another challenge that arose were the varying abilities and styles of each interpreter. One interpreter did not seem to interject their own opinions into the response of the informant, but the other two interpreters seemed to lace the replies of respondents with personal anecdotes or opinions.

Research Dynamics and Positionality

From day one I was known as "the Syracuse University student doing a research project." This likely contributed to power dynamics between myself and farmers, and myself and organizational staff. I tried to be as transparent as possible with refugees before and during interviews that I did not work for RISE or the partner organizations including Salt City Harvest Farms or Cornell Cooperative Extension. I assured participants that their answers would not affect their individual participation in the program and allowed them the option to take a pseudonym if desired over real names. Every participant in this study elected to have their real name published. I was clear to say that their articulation of any challenges and benefits they had experienced in the program would be used to shape the program into becoming more effective for their desires. During farm work hours, I was intentional about spending most of my time in the fields next to the refugee farmers and not positioning myself as authoritative or associated with organizational staff, so as to decrease power dynamics. However, I recognize that what farmers told me could have been influenced by the fear of jeopardizing access to land for the

next year, or fear of unfavorable treatment if critical of the program. For that matter, I also recognize the constraints organizational staff were under to give me answers that would not jeopardize the organization's funding or their own employment situations.

I come to this project with immense privilege as a white, cisgender, settler-colonial North American woman from a middle-class background, who had the time and resources to undertake this study with people who are systematically oppressed in ways I am not. My whiteness and class status allowed me to pursue this study out of personal interests and further, to the end that it would enhance my career. I ultimately pursued this research topic because of prior experience volunteering with refugee services and because I wanted to do research that would (hopefully) benefit an under-resourced community, albeit in some small way. I felt uncomfortable during this research at many points. Though my research questions did not delve into people's experiences in refugee camps, some volunteered information in off-the-record conversations which revealed a glimpse of the traumas they had experienced including famine and intense violence. These conversations were humbling and difficult to process. My inherent biases inevitably affected the outcome of this research, and because of this there are likely many blind spots in this study. I welcome and encourage critical feedback from readers of this study and the ongoing dialogue that I hope comes from future research of refugee agriculture.

V. Findings

I observed the SyRAPP garden and farm programs during the second full year of garden program operation and during the first year of operation for the farm portion. First-year participants started out in the community garden in the North Side neighborhood, on land that was chosen by refugees in the gardening program from a list of a few available sites. Upon successfully meeting the attendance requirements and learning benchmarks after year one, second year participants moved onto a small farm in Kirkville, NY, approximately 12 miles and 25 minutes' drive from the center of Syracuse.

The program in its first year offered farmers a space in the city to grow food in garden boxes, and for second year farmers it offered access to a 1/8-acre plot of land each. It provided access to resources that would otherwise be costly for beginning farmers, including a motorized tiller, drip irrigation lines, water, washing sinks, pest management materials, natural fertilizers, garden boxes, compost, shovels and other tools, seeds, and seedlings. RISE provided van transportation to and from the farm once, oftentimes twice, per week. Water bottles, snacks, and bathroom facilities were also provided by the program.

This case study presents four findings about the SyRAPP program which maps the goals of refugee farmers onto the broader framework of food sovereignty ideals. These principles included, 1) growing food for self-sufficiency, 2) self-determined and culturally-specific ways of growing, 3) controlling land locally, and 4) building knowledge and skills.

Growing for food self-sufficiency

Seven out of nine refugee farmers interviewed answered that their first reason for participating in the program was to grow food for distributing amongst their families and close networks. Market-based intentions such as selling at the farmers market or starting a farming

business were recited as a second-priority to feeding themselves and their immediate communities and reducing grocery bills by supplementing with food grown on the farm. Interestingly, this contrasted with what organizational staff largely spoke about when asked about goals for the future of the program. While staff recognized that participants wanted to grow food for themselves and their families, future goals for the program largely hinged on the program's business and entrepreneurship incubator capabilities.

An excerpt from a 2016 Office of Refugee Resettlement report on the requirements for successful implementation of RAPP acknowledged the difference between these two priorities,

> Where applicable, individuals that only want to grow vegetables for home use on smaller plots in apartment complexes or neighborhood community gardens are differentiated from those that want to derive income from gardening and/or become farm entrepreneurs where plot sizes should be adequate to provide experience that will help clients understand the time, labor, cost, and knowledge requirements of production and marketing (ORR, 2016, p. 5).

From this description and other information available on the RAPP website, "community gardens" are to be used for those with subsistence aims, while farming space is to be saved for those interested in starting businesses. However, the actual demarcations as they played out on the farm were less discernable, and in fact most of the people who farmed on the larger plots of land did not list starting farm businesses as a priority. The RISE program distinguishes between the two avenues for food production in a description on its website, using the titles "the community garden" and "the incubator farm." Ambiguity between what each track actually entailed led to tangible confusion between participants, myself, and staff. Responses from organizational staff reflected heavily on entrepreneurship, business development, and financial literacy aims. The SCHF's partnership with RISE's incubator farm, though not all-encompassing of the SCHF's programming, seemed to take the philosophy of the SyRAPP into the farm business incubator direction.

Some people in the SyRAPP incubator program used space at the incubator farm solely to grow food for subsistence, in which case, they were not as interested or not at all interested in the business incubation aspect of the farm, but more so in educational, self-sufficiency, and cultural aspects. There were farmers who contributed produce to be sold at the markets, but when asked what their priorities were for farming in the program, seven out of nine said they wanted to grow food to eat and then might consider selling what is left. Meanwhile, organizational staff overwhelmingly expressed the future direction of the program in terms of bolstering the incubator portion, which included classes about how to count change, take inventory of produce, wash and prepare produce to regulation standards for selling, and interact with native English-speaking customers. It was acknowledged by organizational staff members that there were people not interested in farm business entrepreneurship, and in fact this became a point of contention as organizational staff expressed their frustration about participants who were not motivated to sell at the markets, or who grew food that was not up to American consumer standards and therefore did not have much success at the markets.

While organizational staff talked about using the program as a business incubator, by far the outstanding quality that participants in the RISE program reported benefitting from was the access they had to fresh, healthy, and culturally-appropriate vegetables that they brought home or distributed on their own to close networks. Some of the vegetables that refugee farmers grew in large quantities because they could not find them in stores easily included okra, mustard greens, African eggplants, long beans, specialty peppers, and special corn varieties. These vegetables were of great value to the refugee farmers and their social networks but did not sell as well at markets where patrons were largely white and middle-class.

Through this finding I suggest that emphasis on entrepreneurship and market-based solutions contrasts with the main priority of RISE participants, who predominately said the purpose of participating in the program was to contribute to feeding their families first, with participation in the market either not of interest or as a second priority after subsistence. When I asked Purna, a Nepali farmer in her second year of the program, her goals for participating in the program, she stated,

> "We have a big family. If there is stuff grown well and it is good, we will eat it because it helps to reduce the grocery bill."

Reducing the grocery bill, particularly by eating what they grew, was cited in numerous interviews with participants as a main reason for farming in the program. Purna's answer conveys the importance of having access to not just any food, but to food that is "grown well" and that is "good." This answer moves beyond mere food security or food access-related concerns which focus on the immediate physical access to a readily-available food supply. Purna's answer conveys a deeper desire that food which her family gets to eat must be grown well and is held to a certain standard of quality. This echoes the principles of food sovereignty which emphasize the importance of food that is culturally-specific and of high quality. Purna's response, "we will eat it because it helps to reduce the grocery bill," implies that her family can rely less on food purchased at the grocery store because they have access to the food she has grown. This resonates with the pillar of food sovereignty that localizes food systems by resisting "governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations" (Nyelini, 2007). By growing her own food, Purna exerts power over her food choices and resists

pressure as a consumer to buy into the corporate food system by localizing control and thereby reducing the power of large food corporations.

Beda, a Bhutanese farmer in her second year, grew up farming with her parents in Bhutan and living on the land that they farmed. Beda farmed in Bhutan when she was young until she was forced to move to a refugee camp in Nepal for 18 years. When asked if she was able to grow food in the refugee camp in Nepal, she said, “Every day I go to school, come back home, go to school. I never go outside or anything.” Beda expressed that being able to farm through the RISE program allowed her to reconnect with the roots of her Bhutanese background, for which she had gratitude. When asked why she mainly participated in the RISE program, Beda expressed,

> I am growing for family, but if I had excess I would sell. I came here to learn, rather than to do all the selling and stuff. I wanted to learn how it grows in the US; how people grow things in the US. I wanted to compare how it was grown back in my country. What season, what weather, and what are the factors that go into growing season here.

Beda’s answer at first, “I am growing for family, but if I had excess I would sell,” implies that she would be open to the idea of selling only if she had extra that went beyond what was used for her family. However, her next statement implies that her original intention for participating in the program was to learn how to grow for herself in the different climate, “rather than to do all the selling and stuff.” Her answer, “I wanted to compare how it was grown back in my country,” related to the growing seasons, suggests a depth of agricultural knowledge Beda comes to the program with of farming and seasonality in her home country. Beda’s answer was similar to many farmers who expressed that they wanted to build their skills and knowledge of farming in an unfamiliar climate.

While seven out of nine farmers reported goals of becoming more self-sufficient through the farming program, there were two farmers whose primary goal was to create a business and

sell to others outside their immediate circles. Francis, a Burundian farmer and interpreter for the program, and Solange, his partner, also Burundian and also a farmer, had already started a farm on their own in Syracuse before they began the program. They expressed that they were adamant that they wanted to grow for the market first and foremost, because as Francis said, “If you have money, then necessarily you eat.” Francis and Solange both praised the efficiency of the American way of farming, which Francis called the “Model agriculture,” and the stark contrast this was to farming in their homelands, which he called the “God agriculture,” because it was dependent upon “the gods” (natural patterns of weather, as opposed to irrigation) to persist. Francis expressed particular interest in learning about the preferences of American consumers so that he could grow what would sell at the markets. Francis and Solange were clear that they wanted to farm first and foremost to make profit off the produce.

The competing priorities of growing for subsistence and growing for the markets consistently came up as a challenge that organizational staff would have to grapple with as the program developed. While staff recognized the importance of the program’s ability to provide culturally-appropriate and nutritionally beneficial foods to families of the farmers, and also articulated the farm’s social benefits, goals for the future primarily included developing greater resources for business training and to increase the participation of refugee farmers in weekly market stands. When asked about how many of the farmers she thought desired to grow for subsistence versus for the market, RISE agricultural coordinator Brandy Colebrook elaborated,

> I’d say it’s fifty-fifty. I’d say there’s maybe four, five people who really might want to make a business out of it, who are motivated to do that and to make it work; and then four or five people who are just not really into going to the market and learning how to sell and just want to take things home. And that might also be why we are having some issues about people going to the farmers’ market often, because they just don’t see the benefit in it and they don’t really want to do that. They just want to be able to take it home.

By highlighting a challenge organizational staff had with recruiting farmers to sell their produce at the farmers markets, Colebrook's response reveals a rift between the desires of staff and those of the actual participants. "They just don't see the benefits," and "they just want to be able to take it home," suggests that the program has expectations for farmers to show up and sell at the markets which are not currently being met. Throughout the season, recruiting people to work the markets to sell their produce became a significant challenge, as on some weeks organizational staff ran market booths on their own to try to sell the produce without the farmers who grew the food actually present. Staff speculated that farmers faced barriers to participating in the market for a number of reasons, including transportation issues, scheduling conflicts, childcare needs, and discomfort with language barriers and handling money from customers.

However, as Beda articulated previously, perhaps it was simply because they were more interested in building skills and knowledge about how to grow food for themselves than they were interested in interfacing with customers and selling at the markets.

Colebrook further elaborated on a tension with the program's future direction regarding what might be done to accommodate both subsistence and market growers. She stated that the goals for the next year of the program included being "more business-oriented," which included plans to bring in a business consultant the following year to speak with the farmers about how to acquire loans. She articulated the program's struggles with balancing the two divisions of farmers,

> People who are not as interested in starting a business, are they just going to keep farming, or are we going to have to tell them that they can't farm anymore? We have to figure out, with the people who don't want to start their own farms, what are we going to do with them? Are we going to keep letting them use the land?

While organizational staff were aware that there were a number of farmers who did not want to use the program as a business incubator, those participants who “just want to be able to take things home” were thought of as something to be “figured out,” whereas the entrepreneurial producers who were interested in starting a business were not seen as an issue, but as an asset. This tension became noticeable throughout the season, particularly during the harvest when produce was abundant, the markets were more profitable, and more people were expected to contribute their produce for selling at the markets. Ultimately, I argue that the ideological divide which resulted from the separation of subsistence-driven farmers and business-driven farmers created a hierarchy which tended to privilege the agricultural “producers” over the agricultural “takers.”

Self-determination

The second finding points to the importance of the program for increasing the control refugees had to determine what and how food was grown. Maggie, a first year Congolese participant in the garden program, reflected this finding,

> The program importance, the first one is we need to eat organic food. Because you grow up, and of course, you eat organic. When we get here, we get everything in the fridge; then when you go to buy the food, there’s oil, sugar, like that, so everybody is scared to eat the food. It is why the people, we want to learn how we can produce the food ourselves. Because if we eat organic food we feel good in our body, and it is no problem.

“So, everybody is scared to eat the food,” suggests that Maggie and others she knows do not trust the mainstream food system, and further, that having to eat industrially-produced food or food that she has not seen being made invokes a sense of fear for what she eats. Maggie’s answer suggests that she values the ability to grow food that she has decided is culturally-acceptable with her preferred diet and that she determines is safe for her consumption. Maggie’s collective language, “It is why the people, we want to learn how we can produce the food

ourselves," is an important rhetorical distinction that suggests a common resistance to industrialized food that not only she feels herself, but that her community has also expressed. The ability to learn how to produce food for themselves speaks to food sovereignty's central goals of localizing control of the food system and the importance of self-determination. Maggie's answer, "when we get here we get everything in the fridge; then when you go buy the food there's oil, sugar," conveys lack of trust in the corporate food system that she sees as not protecting her nutritional needs or dietary safety. Maggie sees growing her own food as a way to take control of what she is putting into her body so that she can "feel good" and have "no problem" with what she is eating. In this case, learning how to grow food for herself that is healthy is of the most importance to her. Growing food the way she wants to gives her peace of mind that it is safe to consume.

The organizational staff at RISE recognized the importance of encouraging self-determination of what to grow, and the structure of the programming greatly reflected this. The farm's educator from Cornell Cooperative Extension, Kayo Green, explained that lesson plans were created by asking the participants to prioritize their top five topics which they wanted to focus on for the year. According to Green, the curriculum is adjusted each year based on these surveys. While there were general guidelines established about what plants grow best in the Syracuse climate, farmers had significant freedom to choose what they would grow each year, so long as they were able to find those seeds to purchase. Beginning in the early spring farmers planned out what they wanted to grow and purchased the seeds they would need. Farmers had to pay for their own seeds sometimes, but RISE staff helped them find what seeds they were looking for and helped them to place orders. What farmers grew was a mix of hard-to-find

culturally-specific items such as okra, long beans, and specialty peppers, as well as more widely-available vegetables like tomato varieties, sweet corn, herbs, and pumpkins.

A strength of the program's organizational structure was that it encouraged participants to grow what was important to them culturally and nutritionally, assisting them along the way to incorporate Western techniques such as irrigation, tillage, and pest management strategies if the farmer was interested in doing so. They were free to incorporate these strategies if they desired but were also able to stick with more traditional methods. Graham Savio, the farm manager at SCHF, acknowledged the balance of recognizing that participants had extensive agricultural experience, while also giving them the tools to incorporate Western techniques,

> I know that the refugees from the Great Lakes region in Africa, the Burundian, and the Congolese refugees are agriculturalists; they grew up farmers, their parents grew up farmers, they are farmers back generations and they know what they're doing. They have a system, a farming that is functional. It's not ideal and I think there are a lot of farming methods and technology from the Western world that they could certainly adopt and improve their practices, but they don't have to adopt our practices wholesale and they're not blank slates who don't know anything about farming.

Farmers were proud of their agricultural knowledge and were eager to share the names and characteristics of plants they had grown in their home countries which they now planted at the SYRAP incubator farm. There were, of course, cultural differences in techniques used by the Somali farmers compared to the Bhutanese farmers compared to Congolese farmers. Cross-cultural knowledge exchange happened somewhat, but the language barriers made that exchange more difficult. The structure of the program was such that the farm educator explained concepts in English with interpreters during the first half-hour and refugee farmers generally stayed in their own rows and worked independently for the remainder of time. I observed that more effort could have been made to facilitate cross-cultural exchange, but a significant barrier was language difference and a lack of interpreters at each farm session.

One similarity across all groups was the practice of intercropping, or planting multiple crops in close proximity, which reduced the amount of weeding and pest control necessary. There was some skepticism from farmers with incorporating Western farming techniques. Ahmed, a second-year farmer from Somalia, said there was a significant difference between his crops, which were planted using the help of a tiller, and his brother Abdu's crops, which were tilled by hand,

> Right now, everybody say to my brother, "Hey Abdu, is this a different flavor?" But I used the same corn to plant and his grows twice as tall. He plant by hand and I used a machine to plant. He put them into the ground; he put one here, one here, he put the other one here. He do it that way. We planted them at the same time. I bring him here; every day we come together, me and him. But his corn grew and my corn, it all died. Because he using like different ways, you know? This corn and this corn we planted the same day. There is no difference, the difference is the person planting the seed to the ground. That is the difference. Not a machine.

Ahmed expressed that the way of farming by hand, without the use of machinery, actually led to greater yield for his brother. This aspect of the program greatly resonated with food sovereignty's emphasis on protecting the self-determined and culturally-specific food production and harvesting methods of small producers. While participants had access to shovels, a motorized tiller, and irrigation, and were provided education about how to use them, it is worth noting that the program did not require them to use these methods, and in fact they were encouraged to farm however they felt most comfortable. Common tools that I would have used such as gloves and trowels the refugee farmers rarely used. Bare hands and oftentimes also bare feet were used to work the soil. Importantly, the program supported creative freedom of farmers to determine what and how to grow for themselves as they saw fit. However, the influence to grow what would sell at the markets may have been a factor that created pressure on some to conform to what buyers would purchase versus what their own families would find most useful.

Proximity to food production

The fourth food sovereignty pillar "places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights" (Nyéléni, 2007, p. 39). Living near the site of food production was important to multiple informants who expressed they desired to someday have a house next to the land where they grew food, similar to how they did in their home countries. Participants expressed their desire to control not only their farmland, but the land where they also lived, and farmland was intricately linked to living space. Ahmed summarized the challenge he felt in transitioning to an agricultural model that did not include living at the site of food production,

> It is kind of a new challenge. Back then, when we were farmers, we had like, our house inside the farm. We didn't go nowhere. So, the time we spent on the farm was the time we spent inside the house. But right now, out here it is way different. We have to pay the electric, we have to pay the rent, we have to pay insurance. But right now, we are looking at doing it the same way we did back home. So, if we could live inside the farm, then we can do the way we do back home. Do you see the difference?

Ahmed was not alone in expressing that they were interested in living where they farmed in the US. Many refugees mentioned in interviews that they had lived on farms in their homelands and had produced food for themselves there. Living at the site of food production invoked traditions of their homelands, and it was a lifestyle that multiple people expressed wanting to pursue in Syracuse.

Although transportation was provided to and from the farm at least once per week, getting there was still a hurdle for many people. The farm in Kirkville was 12 miles from downtown Syracuse and was only accessible by private vehicle, as no public transportation went close to the farm. Because a shuttle van usually took a group of farmers to the site twice per week, this meant that people who had cars and were able to drive to the farm had considerably better success with the harvest than did those who could not get to the farm more frequently than

once or twice per week. Rows became overgrown by weeds or taken by pests quickly if they were not tended to consistently. Additionally, those with cars could more easily bring family members to help them with their plots than those who relied on the shuttle van. Farmers with cars were also able to haul away more produce on a given day than those who relied on the van because there was limited space.

Beda, a second-year farm participant originally from Bhutan said that when her crops were attacked by monkeys or jackals in Bhutan, she was able to step outside of her house and chase them off. This season Beda had experienced significant challenges with keeping deer, groundhogs, and other pests away from her crop, and as a result she experienced significant loss of product. On this farm she said it was difficult to fend off deer because she lived far away from the farm and could not keep an eye on things easily like she would in her home country.

Related to putting control of the food system locally and to living at or near the site of food production, many farmers envisioned a lifestyle that also involved raising livestock at their homes. Organizational staff had begun to look into ways they could assist refugees with opening a communal halal goat farm and slaughter facility. The nearest facility for purchasing goat meat that met halal standards of butchering and processing was located about one hour from Syracuse and was known for being unwelcoming to refugees. Colebrook said there was a large market for local halal goat meat in Syracuse, and she talked about bringing livestock production into the RISE program, but expressed some challenges they faced with figuring out how to fit animal farming into the layout of the program,

> Most refugees really like goat meat but it’s very hard to find, and they pick it out and slaughter it themselves and then they take it home. And there are a few places that they can do that, but they are really far away and the people who own them don’t treat the refugees very nicely. I’ve been there and seen one of the places and they are not very friendly. [The director] wants to start a goat farm out at Salt City Harvest Farm. They [the owners of the land] said we can, but we just need the funding to do it. So that would be

> another program we could do is expand into goat farming as well. A lot of people want chickens too and stuff, so we have to figure out how to fit that in. It's a huge deal, and right now we are trying to not stress ourselves out about thinking about it because we just aren't there yet, but it's a possibility and it's a need. And maybe we wouldn't do it ourselves, but we could help them find land and livestock and give them advice when they need it.

RISE staff have heard the goals and desires of the farmers to farm livestock and they want to be able to use their resources to help refugees start a livestock farm. If the SyRAPP could help refugees through some of the barriers to raising livestock, it would greatly increase their control of the food system. Francis, one of the farmers who had started his own farm prior to the RISE program, associated raising livestock and farming with living on the land,

> In Africa, every person from president to last person, they have a farm. Everybody have a farm. And a house too... In my country, all the farmers who are poor, they live in the village, but everybody have land, land, land. If you do not have a cow or a goat, then you are a farmer. Those are the two things: to keep the animals, or to produce the farm. So, you live there, you work there. Then if you live in town, you know you have land at your home.

The desire to live close to the site of food production conveys an intimate connection refugees feel to live on land that they control themselves and are able to grow food on, and also conveys a resistance to the distancing from the site of food production that the industrial food system perpetuates today. Living close to the site of food production may contribute to feelings of agency, ownership, and control over one's life for refugees, which greatly resonates with food sovereignty's emphasis on land control and resistance to the privatization and control of natural resources by corporations. The control over home and land that is associated with living where one farms should be considered an important factor in refugee resettlement and in refugee farming and gardening in the US.

Building knowledge & skills

The fifth principle of food sovereignty as explained by Nyéléni (2007) is that "food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems…and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering" (p. 39). The RISE program certainly was built on the knowledge and skills of farmers, and because farmers choose what and how to grow, traditional practices are conserved to the extent that farmers want to conserve them. Participants were eager to learn how plants grew in the unfamiliar soil and climate conditions. Many noted that the education they received from the program had helped them greatly to farm more efficiently. Farmers and gardeners were generally eager to learn about the local agroecological systems. The educational objectives expressed by participants as being most helpful and their relative frequencies as were mentioned in interviews are shown in Figure 2.

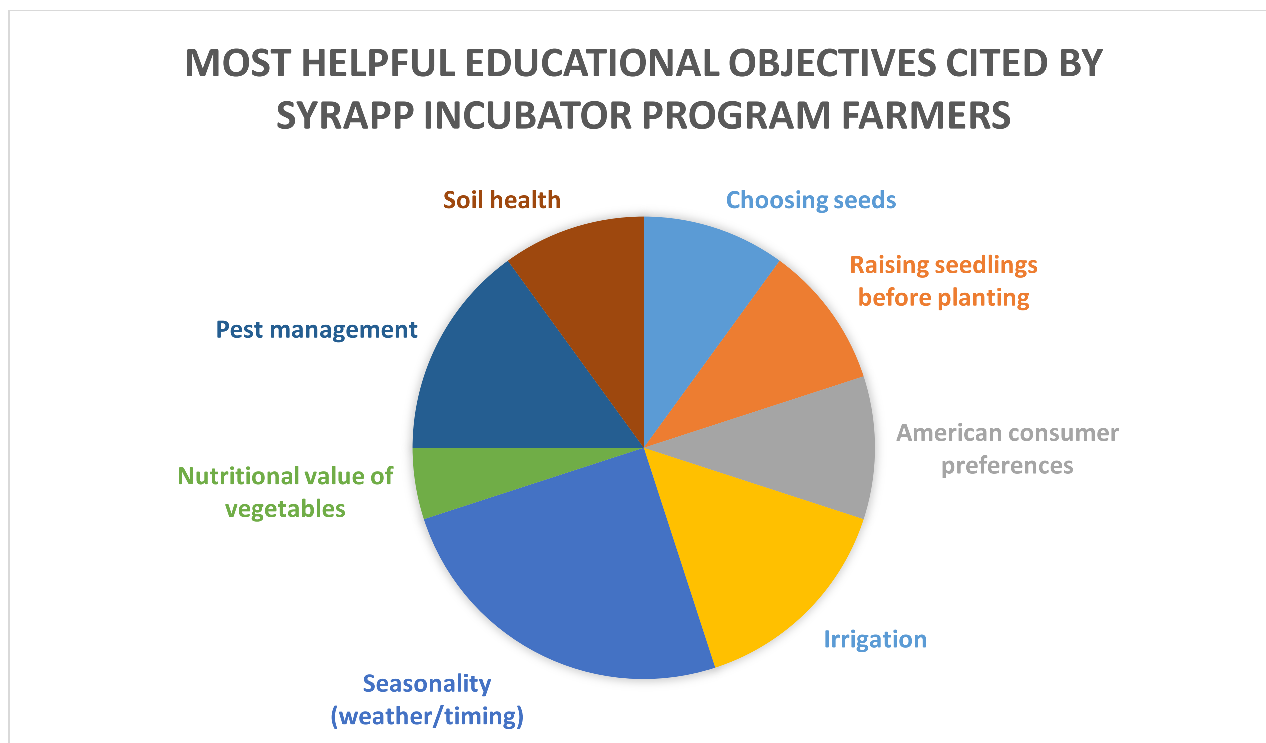

Figure 2: Educational aspects of the SyRAPP program which refugee farmers cited as having been or would be most helpful to learn. Figure my own.

The chart shows seasonality as the most prevalent educational objective that refugees either found most important or wished to have more education about, followed by pest management and irrigation. Ahmed articulated a number of educational objectives he found helpful, namely the use of preseason planning and starting seedlings early,

> It is nice in the classes because you get the knowledge. We don't know the way they do it right now, and we don't know the seasons, and the ahead-of-time preparation you can do yourself. We don't do that back home. Back home you can do by one day or two day. But here you can know when you gonna start planting, what you can do yourself; what is good for the corns and what is good for the beans, and what are the nutrition the beans have too. So, we just learn different ways, nice things. So, the class is good for us right now. In case we go back home, so we can teach people different ways.

It is interesting to note that Ahmed wanted to learn more not only to grow his food better in Syracuse, but also to share the skills and knowledge he learned from the program with people in his home country to "teach people different ways."

Arguably, one of the program's greatest strengths is the access it provides to resources for refugee women farmers. Women made up the majority of informants in this study. Women of color and refugee women face immense barriers to accessing the resources for farming, especially if they want to make farming a profitable business. Minority and female farmers are disproportionately likely to be no-sales farmers (defined by the Census of Agriculture as those who make less than $1,000 from their farm per year), and at least 30 percent of Black, Native American, and women farmers in the US reported no sales in 2012 (Rosenberg, 2017). Refugee women in this study worked as homemakers or in some cases, as low-wage workers in food service, janitorial, or tailoring. Through the farming program, women were able to contribute to the household's food security in meaningful ways.

Every refugee farmer interviewed for this study had previous agricultural experience and confused looks or laughs usually followed when I asked them how much experience they had

with farming prior to the SyRAPP. An excerpt from my field notes highlights the extensive knowledge refugee farmers brought with them to the program,

> My job like most other days was to weed the rows. I started on a new patch that hadn't been planted yet, but someone wanted to plant things there so it was time to get rid of the weeds, which were the height of half of me and pretty dense. I worked my way through the row and tried to move quickly, as there was so much to get picked. My process was to grab by the bottom and yank upwards to pull out the entire root; then, I would throw the weed down into the pathway of the row in front of me and stamp it down with my feet. Then I walked on those weeds so I could move closer to more weeds. After about an hour I had completed a section like this. Then one of the women came over and sifted through the weeds on the ground that I had just finished stamping down, collecting some of the plants into a plastic bag. I asked her why she was taking the weeds from the ground, thinking maybe I had overlooked a valuable plant, and she told me that these were "good weeds" which she used for making medicine. I felt badly that I had stamped on the plants and flattened them.

This excerpt from my field notes is just one small example of my ignorance and the contrasting extensive agricultural and botanical knowledge refugees had before even beginning classes with the RAPP. Everyone I spoke to said they had lived on and worked the land since they could remember being young. SyRAP organizational staff and SCHF organizational staff were attentive to this knowledge, and while they taught Western techniques during the class portion of the day, ultimately they allowed farmers freedom to use whatever methods they saw fit. However, it was clear that some of the farmers specifically wanted to understand more about how to use technologies such as the automatic tiller and irrigation lines to improve technique and increase yield. The educational component of this program was cited by all participants as providing valuable information, and they were eager to become more knowledgeable about region-specific techniques related to seasonality, irrigation, and pest management.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified four main findings that reflect the data I collected with refugee farmers and organizational staff. It became clear quickly that refugee farmers and

gardeners valued, above all else, growing food for self-sufficiency purposes that would reduce their reliance on the industrialized food system. However, while farmers valued the program for its ability to help them achieve self-sufficiency and self-reliance for providing their own food, organizational staff were focused primarily on the economic aspects of the program such as becoming a business incubator. Those who farmed to feed themselves and families were seen as an issue that would have to be figured out in the coming years as the program progressed. The second finding points to the importance of the program for allowing self-determined and culturally-specific ways of growing. RISE and SCHF organizational staff were diligent and mindful about incorporating refugees' cultural preferences into lesson plans and farming techniques. Third, farmers expressed an intimate connection with living at the site of food production and desired to some day be able to do so. Raising livestock was also seen as an important aspect of controlling land locally. And finally, the SyRAPP program provided a broad knowledge base for learning Western farming techniques while also building upon the knowledge and skills refugee farmers already brought to the program with them. Their histories and cultures were seen as valuable assets and farmers were encouraged to share their knowledge with each other and with organizational staff. I have also displayed a number of educational objectives which refugees wished to see expanded in the future. In the next chapter I elaborate upon these findings to provide some practical recommendations for the program based on core food sovereignty principles.

VI. Practical Recommendations

Through these findings I have highlighted some of the ways in which refugees and organizational staff have begun to articulate with parts of food sovereignty's central ideas. In what follows, I make practical recommendations for the program that embrace a food sovereignty approach rather than merely a food security approach. In order to explicitly embrace concepts of food sovereignty, Alkon & Mares (2012) argue that "it is of central importance that food sources are consistent with cultural identities and embedded in community networks" (p. 358). Further, they suggest that "a greater understanding of the constraints of neoliberalism might lead activists away from market-based solutions such as farmers markets…instead, some activists have created local food projects that aim to empower and provide supplies to urban residents who want to produce their own food" (p. 358). I have shown that farmers in the SyRAPP already resonate with the food sovereignty principles related to self-determination, preserving cultural and traditional farming methods, and resisting the corporate food regime. While the organizational staff also reflect some of these principles, I recommend some practical applications that would bring the program closer in line with the Nyéléni Pillars of Food Sovereignty. I point to one example from US urban agriculture that has unapologetically embraced food sovereignty and anti-colonialism in its work, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, as a model that refugee agriculture could embrace.

Improvements I suggest the SyRAPP incubator program adopt to embrace concepts of food sovereignty include: 1) exploring alternatives to market-based programming approaches; 2) centering the work and opinions of refugees for a more grassroots approach; and 3) considering alternative land use and support strategies.

Explore alternatives to market-based programming approaches

The discrepancies between goals of organizational staff for farmers, versus the primary goals described by farmers themselves, maps onto larger conversations about the goals of alternative food access projects versus the projects of food sovereignty. While many seemingly progressive food access projects focus on market-based strategies for food procurement, such as farmers markets, mobile markets, grocery delivery services, and charity, food sovereignty goes beyond market transactions to advocate for a rights-based approach aimed at protecting and expanding the rights of small producers. A food sovereignty approach resists the ways in which food "can be implicitly used to erode social relationships, cultural meanings, connections to place, and the exercising of rights" (Alkon & Mares, 2012, p. 358). Food sovereignty uses a systems approach to connect local movements with how the industrialized food system is related to the larger project of neoliberalism which has decimated peasant livelihoods in the global south.

I suggest the SyRAPP would do well to consider the parallels of the responses of farmers in this study with the principles of food sovereignty which elevates the voices of small food producers and supports their rights to determine their own preferred methods of agriculture outside of market influences. To this end, the organizational programming should reflect that the farm space can be used as a place where subsistence growers can thrive and are respected for their decisions not to sell at the market. Staff might engage farmers in conversations which celebrate the contributions self-sufficiency farmers make to a larger political-economic movement which resists the corporate food regime. Providing workshops for sufficiency farmers about food preservation practices such as canning could help to support them in their desires to use the produce they grow for themselves by prolonging its useful

life. Access to tillage equipment, seeds, translation services, and educational instruction should be available equitably to farmers regardless of their intentions for farming in the program. SyRAPP could also incorporate youth education programming at the farm, or encourage family participation at the farm, that may help refugees pass on and preserve their cultural food production techniques for future generations.

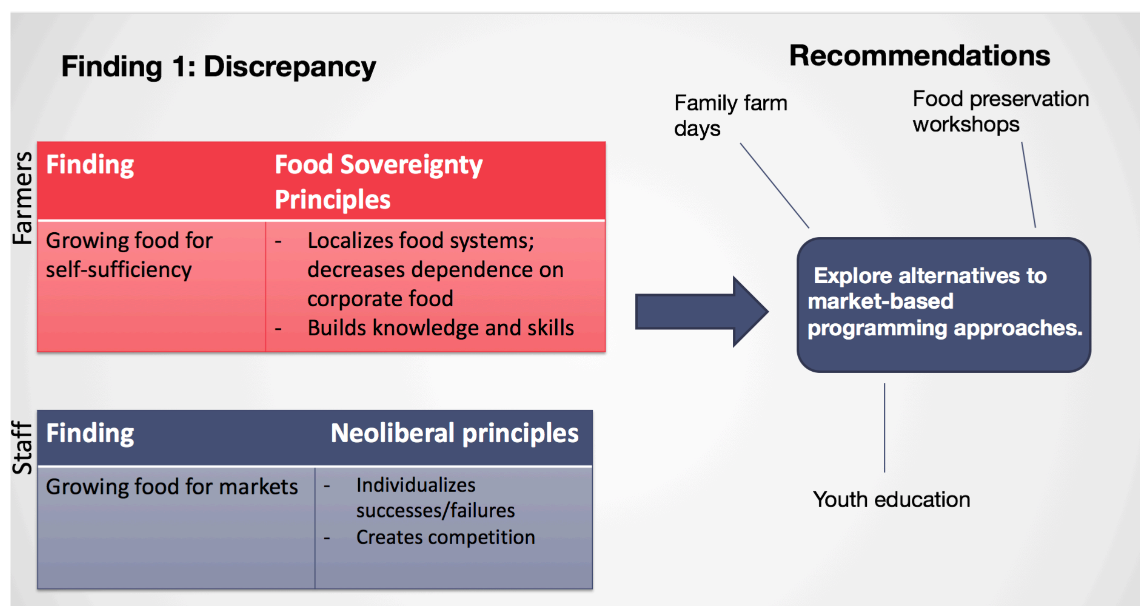

Figure 3: A visual representation of the discrepancy that was observed between organizational staff and participants, the principles each finding resonates with, and recommendations for exploring alternatives to market-based programming approaches.

Explore a more inclusive, grassroots approach

Via Campesina (2009) defined food sovereignty as the right of all people "to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and *their right to define their own food and agriculture systems*" (emphasis my own). While SyRAPP does well to allow farmers the freedom to grow what and how they wish, I recommend expanding and protecting the engagement of the refugee community at all stages of the agriculture program's planning, decision-making, and implementation efforts. Refugees need to be the ones who are primarily shaping the direction of the program. That includes adopting principles and procedures which center the people doing the work; those who have the on-the-

ground, culturally-relevant, practical agricultural and botanical experience. Refugees need to provide input and inclusion at each stage to prevent future problems with the program's administration. This point maps onto larger issues in the non-profit sector of primarily white-led organizations which, while well-intentioned, may miss the mark on true community engagement and inclusion.

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), co-founded by prominent food sovereignty activist Malik Kenyatta Yakini, is a primary example of an urban agriculture initiative that is run for the African American community and by the African American community. The DBCFSN operates D-Town Farms, a robust 7-acre farm that was started and is operated by African Americans in Detroit. Yakini explicitly acknowledges that their efforts are rooted in anti-capitalist and anti-white supremacist work. The About Us section of the DBCFSN website states, "We observed that many of the key players in the local urban agriculture movement were young whites, who while well-intentioned, never-the-less, exerted a degree of control inordinate to their numbers in Detroit's population…The most effective movements grow organically from the people whom they are designed to serve" (DBCFSN, 2019). A food sovereignty approach would involve hiring refugees as paid employees of the farming program beyond merely as translators and ensuring that the board of the farming program has diverse representation which includes members from all of the ethnicities RISE serves.

One effort that would greatly improve the amount of agency refugees have in the program to define their own agriculture and food systems is to expand and improve translation services. Translators were employed by RISE in every language spoken by the group, though not every language was represented on every day of class or while farming. Some farmers who had more advanced English skills acted as translators for their fellow farmers when the employed

translators were not present. Additionally, the quality and equity of translations varied between interpreters. One possibility for improving the equity and consistency of interpretation services is to require or provide the option for interpreters to receive accredited interpretation training. Trainings would help to improve the equity of interpretation services, so as to make the interpretation that is done as effective and consistent across genders and nationalities as possible. This training should focus on the issues of gender bias in interpretation services and other, more basic interpretation skills. Second, the program should consider hiring women interpreters if possible to help eliminate gender bias in interpretation services. As it was, there were already women doing interpretation work for the group informally who were not compensated for this labor.

While refugees do sit on the board of directors at RISE, the agricultural educator, agricultural program coordinator, marketing advisor, and farm managers during the summer of this research were predominantly white and none were refugees, even though RISE was started by refugees and employs a number of refugees outside of its agricultural program. While non-refugee employees and volunteers were essential to running the SyRAPP program, and had noble intentions in doing so, fulfilling the aims of food sovereignty for a self-determined food system will not be possible as long as refugees do not also have multiple seats at the decision-making tables and an active stake in running the day-to-day operations of the farm beyond as mere "participants."

Diversifying the opportunities for refugee leadership and employment within the SyRAPP can also have broader implications for lasting social change. By respecting the rights of refugees and immigrants to control their own food programs, refugees can learn the skillsets of leadership and grassroots organization that are critical for participation in larger broad-based social

movements that affect other social determinants of health. To achieve more equitable participation in the administration of the program, and to associate more closely with food sovereignty principles, SyRAPP should consider embracing a collective approach to leadership that is mindful of grassroots community control, unity, and collaboration. In chapter six I expand upon this idea of community controlled-leadership, which would involve moving from the "self-empowerment" model toward a "community-empowerment" model which acknowledges the power of unity and collective organizing, rather than emphasizing the neoliberal notions of individual responsibility for successes and failures.

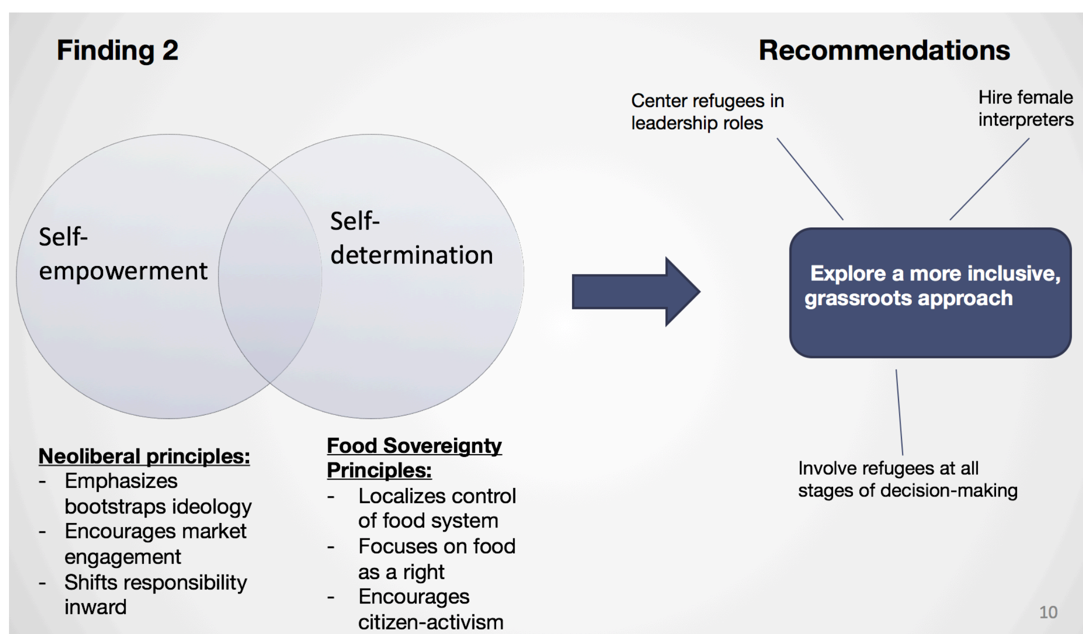

Figure 4: A visual representation of the finding related to self-empowerment vs. self-determination ideologies and the recommendations for embracing a more inclusive, grassroots approach.

Consider alternative land use and support strategies

In order to integrate a food sovereignty approach that involves agency over land management and ownership, the SyRAPP could explore alternative ways to support refugee food producers who desire to live near the site of food production. Though perhaps idealistic to imagine that refugees will be able to return to agricultural lifestyles as in their home countries, future

programming could explore other ways refugees might connect their desires to produce food closer to their living spaces.

Many refugees in Syracuse live in older rental homes which have lead-based contaminants. The SyRAPP might explore partnering with landlord-tenant's organizations to help refugees find rental units that have yard space for food production and could help refugees navigate interactions with landlords or the City of Syracuse about using the land they rent for gardening, bee keeping, or chicken and goat raising. SyRAPP may help refugees to start or expand existing backyard or at-home gardens. This could include partnering with agencies or researchers who can perform free or low-cost soil testing to determine whether a backyard/side yard is safe for growing. This could also include helping refugees with paperwork required to lease or purchase vacant lots on which to start their own community gardens and starting a "tool bank" where people who have graduated from the program can still access shared tools to build garden boxes or to help subsidize their own agricultural projects. The SyRAPP might help educate refugees about canning practices and other food preservation techniques to prolong the benefits of the short Syracuse growing season. Such strategies may help refugees who do not wish to start farm businesses, or refugees who have other employment, with longer-term food security and food sovereignty.

Nyéléni (2007) states that food sovereignty is "fighting for the rights of all migrants, whether they are displaced internally, moved to other countries, or stuck in refugee camps, sometimes for many years" (2007, p. 41). Food sovereignty challenges food insecurity initiatives to look beyond improving the material realities of accessing food for refugees. It actively resists the political-economic forces that cause displacement in the first place – colonialism, the dispossession of land, racial discrimination, and wealth inequality – which have been fueled by

capitalism. The SyRAPP could also look beyond mere food access questions to engage in more explicitly anti-capitalist programming. To start, SyRAPP could support community empowerment by hosting networking events with other refugees and immigrants, provide political education to inform refugees of their rights, and use the position of privilege white allies have to vocally advocate for policy changes that affect refugees at municipal, state and federal levels. This could be a starting point to help refugees acquire the tools to build relationships to mobilize for wider social and political change down the road.

The organization Syracuse GROWS, which played an integral role in beginning the Salt City Harvest Farm's community farm project, has actively explored some strategies which reduce barriers for people to start at-home or community gardens. Syracuse GROWS provides education and access to resources for composting, soil testing, rain gardens, irrigation, raised beds, and greenhouses, among other things. The SyRAPP program can work actively with Syracuse GROWS to ensure farming participants are supported by this network after graduating from the program.

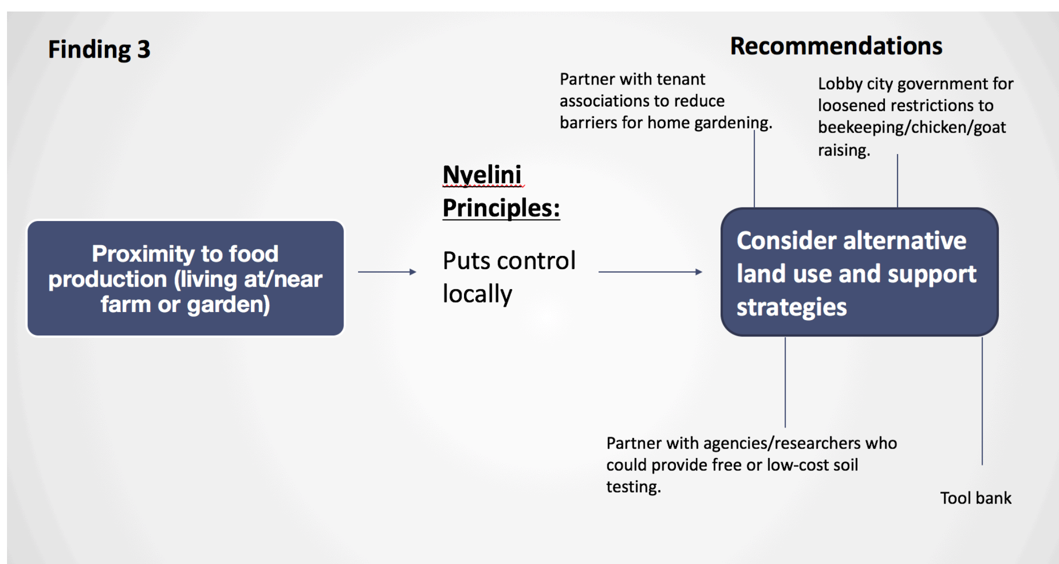

Figure 5: A visual representation of the third finding regarding proximity to food production and recommendations for considering alternative land use and support strategies.

VII. Discussion & Conclusions

Aside from the practical observations and organizational recommendations which I have just highlighted, striking contradictions emerged from my observations with the farm program. As I engaged in this research I questioned why the prevalence of farm business incubation programs continues to grow while farmer suicides and farming debt also rises. Recognizing that the US is in the midst of a farmer and farmworker shortage, and that refugees may play a valuable part in supplying necessary labor for farms, pressing refugees to start farm businesses seems contrary to notion of a “good” job. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, 90 percent of farms with annual sales under $10,000 relied on off-farm sources for the majority of their household income in 2017, and more than 50 percent of farm households made negative incomes, or lost money, from farming. In 2018 the median on-farm household income averaged *negative* $1,316 (Newton, 2018). Further, women and minority farmers are disproportionately discriminated against when attempting to access loans and technical assistance for farms, which has led to Black farmers filing for bankruptcy and increased rates of farmer suicide among people of color (Wozniacka, 2019). And yet, despite well-established information that US farmers do not make enough money off of farming to make a living, and that farming for a living may be detrimental to mental health, programs such as the RAPP perpetuate the belief that farming in the US can provide sustainable income and lead to the “American Dream.” Market-based, entrepreneurial-focused programs especially push this narrative, as they perpetuate the neoliberal bootstraps ideology of the self-made entrepreneur. While farming may in fact benefit mental health and provide supplemental incomes for some, the findings of this research suggest that the program’s greatest importance was decreasing refugees’ reliance on corporate food, decreasing the barriers for refugees to access land, and building skills and knowledge. The RAPP

has immense potential to decrease start-up and equipment costs for women and minority farmers, but research has shown that farming is not a lucrative enterprise in the US. I suggest that refugee agriculture programs should consider engaging more with the cultural, social, and political importance of food production through the framework of food sovereignty to push the boundaries of what is politically safe, if it cares to change the social conditions of refugees.

Substantial inequalities and injustices propel food access disparities. Critical food scholars have argued that food activists who are intent on changing the structure of the food system must not only focus on the physicality or locality of food, but also on the more complex systemic issues surrounding food access including discriminatory housing practices, inadequate housing stock, minimum wages that have not kept up with the rate of inflation, shrinking entitlement programs, and the institutionalized discrimination that perpetuates wealth inequality. As refugee agriculture programs around the country continue to trend toward business incubation projects, the SyRAPP has great potential to step out from the crowd and develop a more radical political agenda that includes advocacy and political education which actively pushes back against capitalism and the corporate food regime. As this research has shown, farmers in the SyRAPP program are already resonating with the more radical principles of food sovereignty through the articulation of their desires and goals for food system self-sufficiency through farming. Organizational goals, however, tend to play it safe by focusing on developing food entrepreneurs.

Those programs with potential to truly transform the treatment of refugees in the US will confront the political-economic forces that have caused forced migration in the first place by decolonizing their own programs, beginning with diversifying their leadership structure to represent those they serve. Grassroots approaches that lead from the ground-up and which

preserve the diverse agroecological knowledges of refugees can get closer to achieving food sovereignty goals. A program that begins to approach the framework of food sovereignty might see refugee farmers not for their potential as entrepreneurs and consumers engaging in market exchanges, but as citizen-activists with the power and agency to transform their own food systems through food self-sufficiency that acts outside of those markets.

Beyond food production, a holistic program might educate refugees about their abilities to organize for institutionalized advancements at the government level. In a political climate which institutionally discriminates against immigrants and people of color, this task is extremely daunting and threatening, and it is not up to refugees to do all of this work. Activist allies with privileges not afforded to refugees should also recognize their responsibilities to actively engage in this collective organization by helping refugees navigate bureaucratic obstacles and voting against discriminatory housing, education, and immigration policies. While urban agriculture is just one small piece of the puzzle, SyRAPP could start by uniting with other local and regional urban agriculture and resettlement projects to take stands on political issues and encourage local governments to work towards goals of engaging refugees in cross-sectoral civic engagement by including refugees in decisions of local government. Involving the voices of refugees into policy work will influence local governments to enact measures which support refugee integration on all fronts, not just as it relates to food production, but for other social determinants of healthy living including adequate housing, healthcare, transportation, and education.

Towards "Community-Empowerment"

A grassroots approach to empowerment involves collective organizing for self-determination (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018). The SyRAPP should consider surveying refugees about the perceptions they have about their capacities for collective efficacy, which Collins et al. (2014)

define as “residents’ perceived collective capacity to take coordinated and interdependent action on issues that affect their lives” (p. 328). Collective organizing is a strategy of resistance to the neoliberal regime that diminishes the emphasis on individual failures and successes, which can lead to self-blame and ultimately to feelings of *dis*empowerment. Self-empowerment perpetuates neoliberal ideas by promoting capitalistic values of competition, entrepreneurship, and individualism while undermining the potential for collective empowerment (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018), while collective empowerment emphasizes the importance of “resistance, agency, and voice” in refugee resettlement (Shome & Hedge, 2002, cited in Dykstra-DeVette, 2018). Collective organizing has historically proven an effective method of enacting lasting social change. By shifting the organizational goals of RISE and the SyRAPP from self-empowerment toward community empowerment, it could begin to create a more sovereignty-focused program which highlights the diversity of culture and traditions which the entire community of refugees in Syracuse contributes to the food landscape.

Steps toward advancing a food sovereignty framework could include increasing the voices of refugees through more robust and equitable interpretation services and hiring refugees to run the agriculture programs. Creating inclusive spaces of those who are affected by resettlement is critical to “the creation of a more equitable and culturally relevant interpretation” (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018, p.190). Further, diminishing the rigid policies enacted by resettlement programs would enhance the abilities of refugees to have agency and self-determination over forming goals and making decisions about the programs (Steimel, 2017, p.103).

Empowerment initiatives that want to truly achieve the goals of the origins of the “empowerment” movement, which include mobilizing for political power and control, need to move away from individualistic and hierarchical economic development models. Instead, they

could intentionally foster diverse collectively-built and grassroots coalitions to organize for improved conditions. Ultimately, a "community empowerment," coalition-building, politically-conscious resettlement program would depart from emphasizing individual empowerment by engaging groups of people with some commonalities to create a "cooperative ethic in their talk by engaging in dialogue to coordinate their efforts to pursue common goals" (Rogers & Singhal, 2013, p. 72).

Conclusions

The SyRAPP incubator program through RISE provided numerous material benefits to participants, including securing fresh, culturally-appropriate, self-determined foods for refugees and minimizing the barriers to entry of farming for women and people of color. Organizational staff worked within the confines of their financial restrictions to provide plots of land, valuable agricultural education, and to introduce farmers into a broader network of urban food producers in Syracuse. The farmers in this program articulated numerous goals that I have illuminated through the principles of food sovereignty, and the program could embrace these concepts as a powerful tool for future administration. Namely, the cultural and political-economic values of self-sufficient food production should be emphasized over the economic contributions of refugee labor to the neoliberal market. This critique goes beyond the level of organizational staff, who are understandably working within the confines of their roles, to indicate a necessary cultural and rhetorical shift from funders, planners, and politicians who continue to fund projects based on quantifiable metrics that uphold economic development while undermining other social, political, and health benefits to self-determined food production beyond what is quantifiable. The non-profit organizations who have stepped in for the state as administrators of refugee services

are privy to strict funding requirements which want to see the economic impact of refugees more than their important cultural or political contributions.

My hope is that this research has helped to expand the breadth of knowledge about why some refugees want to grow food themselves, and the importance of protecting their rights to do so. With a food sovereignty understanding I hope that engagement of refugees in public open spaces will continue to rise and that the social and cultural contributions that refugees bring to the fabric of our communities will be valued over their economic contributions and productivity as mere laborers and consumers.

Limitations and future research

I chose to conduct qualitative participatory research because I believe in the power of storytelling and knowledge production through engagement with others. Qualitative methods were preferred to quantitative methods in this study because this method allowed me to process knowledge through an intimate exchange of empirical information rather than through an abstract conception of numbers. Refugees are too often seen by their "numbers," and this research was carefully constructed to give them a front-seat voice in the project. As with any research, this project has strengths and limitations. My data interpretation is limited to a select number of interviews, and while I collected quality, complex data, it is confined by the number of participants that were engaged in the agricultural program and the small numbers of organizational staff. It is possible that interviewees were not fully accurate or honest in their responses. I have, to the best of my ability, attempted to convey their voices as honestly and transparently as possible.

This study is limited to one refugee agricultural program in a mid-size city in New York. If the study were expanded to other metropolitan or rural areas, I expect that the results would

show some overlapping benefits and challenges. However, this case study is an incomplete picture of the RAPP model and does not assume that any two programs operate identically. Future research should expand this project to explore the ways in which refugee agriculture beyond Syracuse, and funded by diverse methods, are unfolding. I intend to continue this research by further investigating the experiences of refugees and food preservation practices, urban planning practices related to vacant land that can be used for farming, and the processes that refugee use to prepare produce that is brought home from farms or gardens. In the future researchers might also consider a cross-examination of multiple RAPPs in diverse regions to determine the different strategies and approaches used across spaces.

Appendix

Confidentiality Agreement of Interpreters

Confidentiality Agreement

I, the undersigned agree to provide translation services for the research study entitled *Assessment of an organized farming project for New Americans in Syracuse, New York,* which interviews New Americans about their experiences with involvement in the Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment Agricultural Program at Salt City Harvest Farms in Syracuse, New York.
I understand that all information collected for the study is to remain confidential. In adherence with this policy, I will not document, release, or reveal any project data or personal information, including names, titles, and other identity-revealing information of project participants.
My signature below indicates that I fully agree to maintain the confidentiality of all project data and project participants. If for any reason I feel that I am unable to uphold this policy, I will terminate my participation in this project.

____
____
Signature of project interpreter Date

____
Print name of project interpreter

____
____
Signature of investigator Date

____
Print name of investigator

Appendix
Interview Guide
SyRAPP New American Farming Program

1. Organizational support

- What is your preferred gender?
- What is your age?
- With what ethnicity do you identify?
- What languages do you speak with some fluency?
- How did you get involved in this position?
- How would you describe your role in the project?
- What are your goals for the farming project this year? The farming program more long-term?
- What are some of the barriers or challenges you have experienced working with Salt City Farms/RISE?
- What are some of the barriers or challenges do you think are experienced by participants in the farming project at Salt City/ RISE?
- What do you think are the advantages of the project to the participants?
- Are there advantages of the project to the broader Syracuse community?
- Are there concerns you have about the project as it develops?
- Who is involved in the gardening/ farming as participants? Individuals? Family members? Children? Non-familial community members?
- Do you think there is a difference between who is involved in gardening/ farming in this project as compared to gardening/ farming in their homelands?
- What would you like to learn about from the participants (as related to the project)?

2. Current participants

- What is your gender?
- What is your age?
- What year did you arrive in the US?
- What is your primary occupation or job?
- What region or country of the world are you from?
- How long have you been involved in Salt City Farms?
- Where else have you farmed or gardened?
- If you farmed in your home country, in what capacity? (Home gardens, commercially, other?)
- Why do you participate in the farm project(s)?
- About how often do you participate in the project during the summer (days per week/ weeks per year)?
- Are you able to go to the farm as often as you would like?
- What prevents you from going to the farm?
- What do you like about farming with RISE?

- What do you dislike about farming with RISE?
- Do you think the program is available to everyone who wants to join? Why or why not?
- Does your family use the food grown at the farm?
- Do you farm on your own or with your family members, children, or others?
- Is there a difference in who is involved with farming as compared to your homeland?
- Do you grow food that you consumed in your home country? Why or why not?
- How important is this project for the food security of for your household and/or family?
- How important is the project for spending time with friends or family?
- How important is the project for making money for you and/or your family?
- How important are the skills you have learned in the program?
- What is valuable about the farming project?
- What are some challenges you have encountered being a part of the farm project?

Appendix

Permission for Access from Partner Organization

11 May 2018
Office of Research Integrity and Protections
Syracuse University
214 Lyman Hall
Syracuse, NY 13244

To Whom It May Concern:

Cheyenne Schoen and Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern have requested permission to collect research data from participants in the Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment New American farming program through a project entitled *Organized farming projects for New Americans: Identifying benefits and barriers through a case study in Syracuse, New York.* I have been informed of the purposes of the study and the nature of the research procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher.

As a representative of the Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment organization, I am authorized to grant permission to Cheyenne and Laura-Anne to recruitment, data collection, space to conduct the research, and translators.
If you have any questions, please contact me at *315-447-4343.*

Sincerely,
Brandy Colebrook
Syracuse Refugee Agriculture Program Coordinator

Appendix

Institutional Review Board Approval of Human Participants

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
MEMORANDUM

TO: Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern
DATE: August 3, 2018
SUBJECT: **Expedited Protocol Review - Approval of Human Participants**
IRB #: 18-177
TITLE: *An Assessment of an Organized Farming Project for Refugees*

The above referenced protocol was reviewed by the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and has been given **expedited approval.** The protocol has been determined to be of no more than minimal risk and has been evaluated for the following:

1. the rights and welfare of the individual(s) under investigation;
2. appropriate methods to secure informed consent; and
3. risks and potential benefits of the investigation.

The approval period is **August 1, 2018** through **July 31, 2019**. A continuing review of this protocol must be conducted before the end of this approval period. Although you will receive a request for a continuing renewal approximately 60 days before that date, it is your responsibility to submit the information in sufficient time to allow for review before the approval period ends.

Enclosed are the IRB approved date stamped consent and/or assent document/s related to this study that expire on **July 31, 2019**. **The IRB approved date stamped copy must be duplicated and used when enrolling new participants during the approval period** (may not be applicable for electronic consent or research projects conducted solely for data analysis). Federal regulations require that each participant indicate their willingness to participate through the informed consent process and be provided with a copy of the consent form. Regulations also require that you keep a copy of this document for a minimum of three years after your study is closed.

Any changes to the protocol during the approval period cannot be initiated **prior** to IRB review and approval, except when such changes are essential to eliminate apparent immediate harm to the participants. In this instance, changes must be reported to the IRB within five days. Protocol changes must be submitted on an amendment request form available on the IRB web site. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB within 10 working days of occurrence.

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Katherine McDonald
IRB Chair

DEPT: FALK Public Health, Food Studies & Nutrition, 544 White Hall **STUDENT:** Cheyenne Schoen

Research Integrity and Protections | 214 Lyman Hall | Syracuse, NY 13244-1200 | 315.443.3013 | **orip.syr.edu**

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Vita

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EDUCATION

2017-2019 **Master of Science**, Food Studies, Department of Public Health, Food Studies, and Nutrition, David B. Falk College, Syracuse University, New York

2013-2017 **Bachelor of Arts**, Communication Studies with Journalism and German concentrations, College of Arts & Sciences, University of Portland, Portland, Oregon

Thesis:

Activism through food: Negotiating interpersonal communication conflicts of veganism

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Fall 2017 **Graduate Teaching Assistant** to Dr. Evan Weissman, Dept. of Food Studies, Syracuse University

Spring 2018-19 **Graduate Assistant** to Dr. Anne Bellows, Dept. of Food Studies, Syracuse University

Spring 2019 **Research Assistant** to Dr. Rick Welsh, Dept. of Food Studies, Syracuse University

INTERNSHIP

Fall 2019 **Food Policy Planning Intern** at City of Pittsburgh Department of Urban Planning, Division of Sustainability & Resilience, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

AWARD

2017 **The Roseane Do Socorro Gonçalves Viana Human Rights Award** - David B. Falk College, Syracuse University: Best graduate paper on human right to food, nutrition, and/or health.

ACACDEMIC JOURNAL EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE

2018-19 **Editorial Board**, Copy Editor, Graduate Journal of Food Studies, Association for the Study of Food & Society