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IN THIS ISSUE

This year we celebrate a decade of *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* (CFS/RCÉA), having published our first issue in May 2014. The management team thus takes a moment—in the space on an editorial—to look back across the history of the journal and toward its future. They collectively reflect on the journal's ethos, its range of publications, as well as its continued efforts to promote rigorous scholarship done differently.

From the state of the journal to the state of the field, Chartrand et al. offer us an exploration of food studies—begun during a plenary session at the eighteenth annual assembly of the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS)—as a broth that can only be enriched (not spoiled as the old adage would have it) by many participants bringing diverse ingredients.

This issue is its own enriched broth. Keira Loukes uses a decolonial feminist lens within a political ecology community of practice to think through Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9 territory (Northern Ontario). Overend et al. consider the unexpected lessons—unlearning and re-learning and being uncertain—that came out of a collaborative research project on urban berry foraging with their home institution's Indigenous Learning Centre. Braun et al. explore how professionally and managerially employed women in agriculture in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta negotiate farm femininity—this in an industry characterized by rural hegemonic masculinity. Li et al. offer up a review of food asset maps in Canada and find in them a marked tendency to reinforce the values of a settler-colonial food system. Pentz et al. set out to identify and classify the various explanations given for food price changes in Canada, and to evaluate the scientific rigor of these explanations. Song-Nichols takes us through a method for historical menu analysis. These documents, he writes, can be read as maps, giving shape to those who author them and those who read from them (and doodle on them, as the case may be).

On the heels of the Federal Government's funding commitment toward a national school food program, we offer up two responses in the form of a commentary and a research article. Zhang et al. recognize the timeliness of this commitment amidst rising food costs and chronic disease. Niimi-Burch et al. turn their attention to mothers who, at present, remain primarily responsible for packing school lunches. Bloomfield provides a review of Dana James and *Evan Bowness' book, Growing and Eating Sustainably: Agroecology in Action*, and we conclude the issue with our latest installment of the Choux Questionnaire. Take a look to find out what kinds of gardens make Greg de St. Maurice happiest, and what it is about composting that he dislikes.

Our cover image is of red currants, grown and purchased in Southwestern Ontario. Like this issue, they are sweet and tart and toothy, too.

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Canadian Food Studies La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation

Editorial

Reflecting on a decade of Canadian food studies[1]

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Abstract

In this editorial, the Management Team of *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* (*CFS/RCÉA*) looks back across the history of the journal and towards its future. They collectively reflect on the journal's ethos, its range of publications, and what the future might hold in an effort to promote rigorous scholarship done differently.

Keywords: *Canadian Food Studies*; journal ethos; range of publications; open access; collaboration; transition; pedagogy

[1] Authors are listed alphabetically and not in order of contribution. All authors have contributed equally. French version follows.

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Résumé

Dans cet éditorial, l'équipe de direction de *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* (CFS/RCÉA) se penche sur l'histoire de la revue et son avenir. Ses membres réfléchissent ensemble à l'éthos de la revue, à la variété de ses publications et à ce que l'avenir pourrait nous réserver, avec l'intention de promouvoir une recherche rigoureuse faite différemment.

Introduction

This year we celebrate a decade of *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* (CFS/RCÉA), having published our first issue in May 2014. The journal was established by the Canadian Association for Food Studies / L'Association canadienne des études sur l'alimentation (CAFS/ACÉA) because there was a desire to publish transdisciplinary food studies research that reflected the work being done in Canada and on Indigenous territories. There was also a recognition of an increase in scholarly gatekeeping (e.g., journals with paywalls generating profit from publicly funded academic research) and the growth of open access platforms with inordinately high publishing fees. CAFS/ACÉA wanted to publish differently.

For its first few years, CFS/RCÉA was led by Editor-in-Chief Ellen Desjardins, Associate Editors Phil Mount, David Szanto, and Rod MacRae, and Managing Editor Wesley Tourangeau. The team worked tirelessly to establish and evolve the journal and maintain a commitment to the CAFS/ACÉA scholarly community, despite operating with minimal resources. Today, we write this commentary as three co-Editors-in-Chief and two co-Managing Editors, who remain committed to the values and space our journal holds. As we enter our tenth year, we look back across the history of the journal and towards its future.

The journal's ethos

In her inaugural commentary, Ellen Desjardins (2014) wrote that the journal's ethos is a reflection of the bowl-shaped graphic that is central to CFS/RCÉA's visual identity: "It embodies a sense of commonality (a universal cooking and eating vessel), as well as fluidity and openness (the shape is not closed). It symbolizes our journal's commitment to inclusivity and receptiveness to new ideas and contributors" (p. 3). The decision to make CFS/RCÉA an open access (OA) journal was aligned with this intention. It followed what we saw as the ethos of CAFS itself—centred around the belief that the knowledge about what is and has been happening in food, food culture, and food systems should be publicly available and widely shared. Establishing the journal was also an important part of the continuing development of food studies as a field, including bringing light to what is distinctive about food and food systems within Canada and Indigenous territories. Putting that knowledge behind a paywall seemed contradictory, particularly when the majority of our research is funded either directly or indirectly by the public.

The Open Journals System (OJS) software platform that we adopted as our publishing engine made the OA intention feasible. Created by the Public Knowledge Project out of Simon Fraser University, OJS is used by more journals worldwide than any other scholarly publishing software, today driving more than 30,000 journals in 150 countries (Public Knowledge Project, 2024). OJS and its member publishers are creating and exchanging new understandings about how academic research should be shared. The broader OA context has thus become a movement and community of practice, bounded by a common understanding about establishing a "moral economy" of scholarship (Bacevic & Muellerleile, 2018). By being part of this community, CFS/RCÉA contributes to and benefits from a larger conversation about democracy, accessibility, and openness in academia, extending from how research is peer reviewed and legitimized to the ways in which knowledge should be gathered and disseminated, as well as the kind of credit that should be given to research collaborators, co-authors, reviewers, journal editors, and copyeditors. OA is about making articles available to readers, but it is just as much a mindset about decentralizing power and contributing to the decolonization and democratization of academia's foundations.

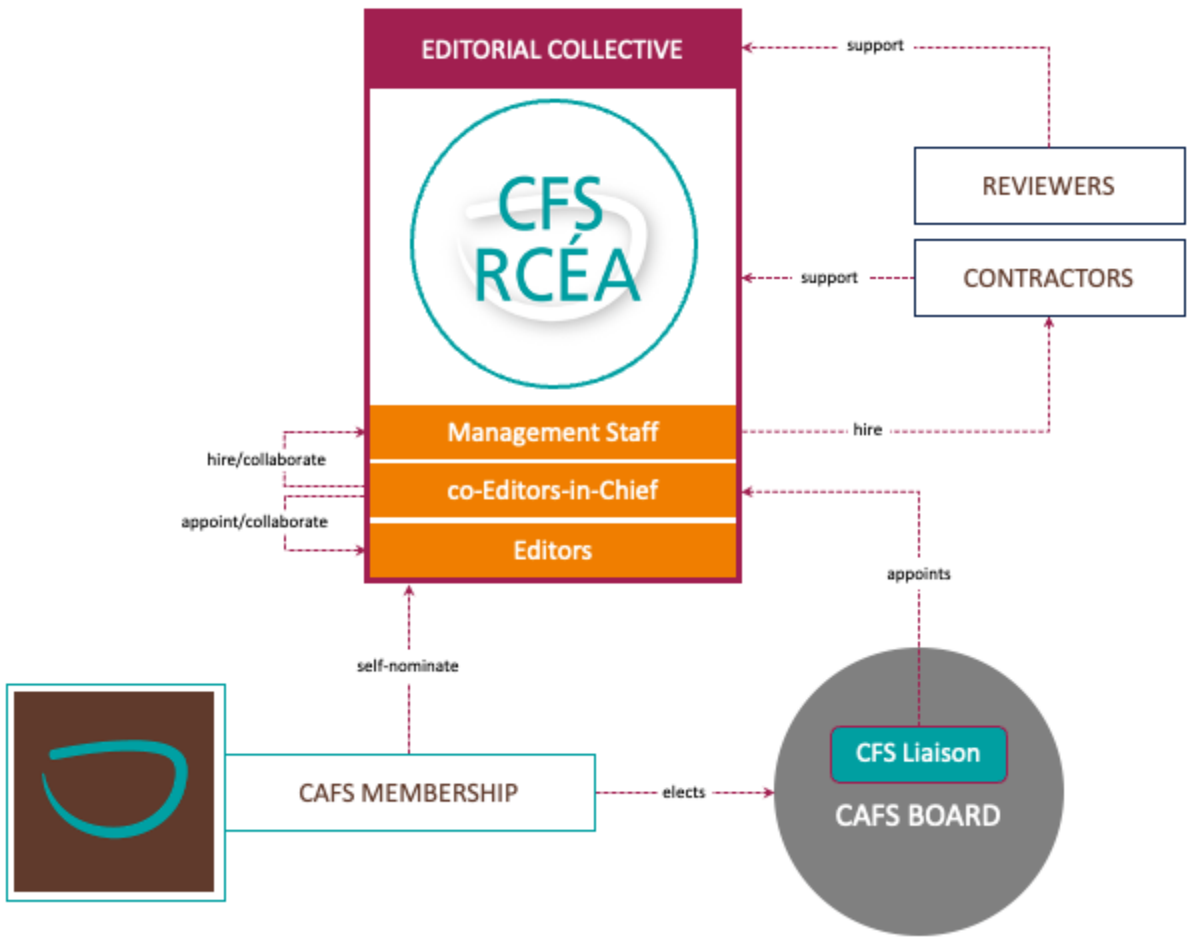
CAFS/ACÉA's ethos and the ethico-political stance of OA converge in CFS/RCÉA, engendering many of the policies and perspectives we now practise. These include maintaining high standards in the work we publish while also making the review and revision process more dignified for authors and an occasion for expanding and refining ideas. It also means that we celebrate and promote publications that take forms other than conventional research papers. These include Perspectives and Commentaries, Field Reports, and Audio-Visual and Art/Design works. Moreover, these types of publications help expand the ways that food and food systems knowledge is valued, as well as the pool of people who produce that knowledge. In parallel, our progressive publishing fee schedule is designed to make publishing with CFS/RCÉA accessible, regardless of economic privilege, while ensuring the journal's ongoing financial sustainability. Although making publishing as accessible as possible is a top priority, so is compensating our staff for their time, knowledge, and skill. In conjunction with the Aid to Scholarly Journals program of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, we feel that this model has struck the right balance.

Our exposure to and interactions with other actors in the OA community[2] have also helped strengthen the journal's internal structure, including our governance model and the development of policies and protocols for academic integrity, workflow, and communications. We have established a governance structure that prioritizes collective and open processes, that includes the CAFS/ACÉA board and its members, journal editors, and management staff (see Figure 1). Care and trust go hand-in-hand with rigorous editing and production management, and social media promotion helps us reach audiences beyond the immediate academic and food studies community. As we know too well, being part of academia can bring many systemic challenges, including oppressing and excluding some voices while overemphasizing others. This is why

[2] For example Directory of Open Access Journals, Humanities and Social Science Commons, Rebus Foundation or SPARC.

being a part of the OA ecosystem is so crucial - it enables systemic responses to systemic issues.

Figure 1: The CFS/RCÉA Organigram



Range of publications to date

Over the past decade, CFS/RCÉA has published 27 issues and 364 articles. Going through the archive, it is possible to see the way the journal transformed itself through the evolution of the thematics addressed in the journal. The first few issues were concerned with defining food studies as a field of research in Canada and Indigenous territories. Then, in 2016–17, the topic of the field's evolution was addressed directly, and has since been pervasive. In 2018, the journal began more explicitly engaging with systemically excluded perspectives, specifically those of feminist and Indigenous scholars and practitioners. Over time, the journal matured, with the range of topics addressed becoming ever more broad and diverse. Despite this breadth, a few key terms come to the fore, suggesting certain convergences within our community, if not a singular sense of synthesis. These terms come up regularly in publication and issue titles, as well as our introductions and editorials. To speak botanically, these words subtend, mark the boundary of, or enfold the others.

Open

The 27 issues over the past ten years cover a wide swath of disciplinary boundaries and forms of expression, including a cover image of a poster made entirely of chocolate (this by chef-professor and PhD candidate, Luciana Godoy [2021]). That the poster[3] was eventually broken apart and shared and eaten speaks to the journal's broad view of content consumption.

Collaboration

Work in food studies does not take place in isolation or in siloed departments. Many CFS publications are collaborative efforts among faculty and students, Indigenous and settler academics, and researchers, and community practitioners. The authors collaborate together and with the community, but they also aim to articulate what collaboration looks and feels like in practice, including barriers to overcome and relationships to navigate. As members of the RAIR (Relational Accountability for Indigenous Rematriation) collective write, "this work of relational accountability is a form of 'field work'–or 'feels work' as some of our members refer to it" (Kepkiewicz et al., 2023, p. 13).

Transition

Contributors to CFS/RCÉA are committed to documenting and advocating for change to food systems—including through the lenses of post-structural feminism, anti-racism, arts-integrated research, political ecology, cultural studies, human geography, and Indigenous ways of knowing, to name just a few. And, while change can be positive and possibilities are explored for more just, sustainable, healthy food systems, our authors are careful to delineate the tensions and struggles, troubling developments, and sometimes dubious narratives that can accompany our best efforts. Ryan Katz-Rosene (2020), for instance, notes the increasing calls for a "global dietary transition" to save the planet and improve human health (p. 5). But he asks, does this mean we all have to stop eating meat and dairy and forget about that "romantic distraction" called local food?

Pedagogy

In 2016, Jennifer Sumner (2016) observed that "those who study learning have not often turned their gaze toward food, while those who study food have generally overlooked the learning associated with it" (p. xix). The sheer number of teaching and learning-centered articles, including a dedicated themed section in issue 8.4 (2021, "Food Pedagogies in Canada"), offer a corrective to this incisive statement. The authors engage with reflexive and critical food pedagogy and participate in the "pedagogical turn" (Flowers & Swan, 2012, p. 424), expanding, as Ellyse Winter (2020) writes, "the definition of pedagogy to include the spaces and sites of

[3] The poster can be viewed following this link https://canadianfoodstudies.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cfs/issue/view/29.

teaching and learning outside the system of formal education" (p. 132).

Looking ahead

As the world of academic publishing becomes more crowded, complicated, and confusing, we hope that CFS/RCÉA will continue to be a meeting point and space of risk-taking for community and academic researchers, food practitioners, activists, artists and media creators. The interdisciplinary field of food studies has grown and changed substantially over the past decade, and CFS/RCÉA has worked to carve out a space for diverse ideas, people, and approaches to reflect and critically engage with food and food systems in the human and more-than-human worlds. In addition to publishing high quality research and review articles, and building on what has already been accomplished, we aim to nourish CFS/RCÉA as a space for new and creative forms of food and food systems scholarship.

As food studies and the world around us continue to change, so will CFS/RCÉA. Looking forward, the journal will remain vigilant in adhering to its values, but also flexible and open to new ideas and processes. Scholarly journals must be more than a repository for academic research and a vehicle for career advancement. As academia becomes more entrenched in dominant politico-economic structures, and universities and colleges grapple with core mandates and purposes, the spaces of critical thinking, rigour, and creativity such as those at CFS/RCÉA must be fought for. In a scathing critique of institutions of higher education subordinating themselves to corporate and market-driven values, Henry Giroux (2017) argues that "educators need to initiate a national conversation in which the classroom is defended as a place of deliberative inquiry and critical thinking, a place that makes a claim on the radical imagination and a sense of civic courage" (n.p.). Scholarly journals are at the precipice of this shift and play an essential role in discussion, debate, and disagreement in pursuit of more just and equitable societies.

Many journals like CFS/RCÉA struggle with how to deal with the labour of running themselves as non-profit OA publications. While tenured academics with job security can often afford to support journal work (e.g., governing, editing, peer reviewing), essential administrative tasks require a specific set of skills and knowledge (e.g., coordination, copyediting, layout, technology, communications). Finding the funding to support staff to do these tasks is becoming more difficult. This is especially challenging as the world of academic publishing becomes ever noisier and confusing, with increasing content being published faster and more haphazardly. While the publishing domain is dominated by a few large companies, new journals are emerging at a staggering rate. As such, it is becoming more complex to determine which journals are legitimate, and which are negligent and simply profiting from publicly funded academic labour. Some, often run by conglomerates focused on the financial bottom line, show little interest in encouraging and supporting critical debate. The speed and carelessness of peer review and decision making in these journals is evident, favouring volume over content quality. Even more concerning is that some corporations with large slates of OA journals have shifted their revenue models from publishing-fee and subscription income to the sales of data analytics. This information has started to become a way that academic institutions make hiring decisions, fund or defund research programs, and prioritise future directions for faculties and departments (Aspesi et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The good news is that funding institutions in Canada and worldwide are increasingly committing to OA publishing, which opens great possibilities for journals such as CFS/RCÉA. However, it also carries risk regarding the quality of the editorial and publishing process. We will keep working to make sure the research community in Canada and on Indigenous territories has access to a space for OA publishing that makes the best of their work while ensuring food studies scholars have access to a publishing space that affords them the possibility of exchanging rich, new, and diverse ideas.

We conclude by expressing our gratitude to the CFS/RCÉA journal community, including its readers, authors, creators, reviewers and editors. Together, we will make this journal a place for rigorous scholarship done differently.

Rachel Engler-Stringer is a Professor in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology in the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan and a researcher with the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit. Her research interests include school food programs, community food security, food environments and food access, health promotion, and community-based and participatory research.

Laurence Godin is assistant professor of sociology at Université Laval and researcher at the NUTRISS Center -Nutrition, health and society. Her work focuses on sustainable consumption, the sociology of food and social inequalities. She is especially interested in the way food, sustainability, and inequalities meet in households and their everyday life, as well as the dynamics of change in everyday practices.

Charles Z. Levkoe is the Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems, a member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada, and a Professor in the Department of Health Sciences at Lakehead University. His community-engaged research uses a food systems lens to better understand the importance of, and connections between social justice, ecological regeneration, regional economies, and active democratic engagement.

Alexia Moyer holds a PhD in *études anglaises* from Université de Montréal and completed an FRQSC post-doctoral fellowship with McGill's Department of English and McGill's Institute for the Study of Canada. With a background in literary studies, cultural studies, and food studies, she writes about cookbooks, food memoirs, culinary histories, and other forms of literary cookery. She runs a collective of scholarly editors and translators called redline-lignerouge.

David Szanto is a freelance academic working across food culture and food systems. He has teaching, research, editorial, and consulting relationships with institutions in Canada, Europe, the U.S., and Australia, and has written extensively on food, design, performance, and ecology. He is host-producer of the podcast, *Making a Meal of It,* and co-editor of two open access textbooks, *Food Studies: Matter, Meaning, Movement* and *Showing Theory to Know Theory: Understanding Social Science Concepts through Illustrative Vignettes.*

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Une décennie d’études canadiennes sur l’alimentation en revue

Introduction

Cette année, nous célébrons les dix ans de *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l’alimentation* (CFS/RCÉA), notre premier numéro ayant été publié en mai 2014. La revue a été créée par l’Association canadienne des études sur l’alimentation/ Canadian Association for Food Studies (ACÉA/CAFS) en réponse à un désir de publier des recherches transdisciplinaires sur l’alimentation qui reflétaient le travail effectué au Canada et dans les territoires autochtones. L’Association avait également pris conscience de l’augmentation des barrières pour participer à la recherche – les revues payantes générant des profits grâce à la recherche universitaire financée par des fonds publics – ainsi que de la croissance des plateformes en libre accès exigeant des frais de publication démesurés. L’ACÉA/CAFS voulait publier différemment.

Au cours de ses premières années d’existence, la revue CFS/RCÉA a été dirigée par l’Éditrice en chef Ellen Desjardins, les éditeurs adjoints Phil Mount, David Szanto et Rod MacRae, ainsi que le rédacteur en chef Wesley Tourangeau. L’équipe a travaillé sans relâche pour établir et faire évoluer la revue et maintenir son engagement envers la communauté scientifique de l’ACÉA/CAFS, malgré des ressources minimales. Aujourd’hui, nous, les trois co-rédactrices et co-rédacteur en chef, et la co-coordonnatrice et le co-coordonnateur d’édition, restons attachés aux valeurs et à l’espace de notre revue. À l’aube de sa dixième année d’existence, nous jetons un regard sur son histoire et son avenir.

L’éthos de la revue

Dans son texte inaugural, Ellen Desjardins (2014) écrivait que l’éthos de la revue est reflété par la forme de bol qui est au cœur de l’identité visuelle de CFS/RCÉA : « Il incarne un sens du commun (un récipient universel pour cuisiner et manger) aussi bien que la fluidité et l’ouverture (la forme n’est pas fermée). Il symbolise l’engagement de notre revue en faveur de l’inclusivité et de la réceptivité aux nouvelles idées et aux nouveaux contributeurs » (p. 3). La décision de faire de CFS/RCÉA une revue en libre accès était conforme à cette intention. Elle concordait avec ce que nous considérions comme l’éthique de l’ACÉA/CAFS elle-même, fondée sur la conviction que les connaissances sur ce qui se passe et s’est passé dans le domaine de l’alimentation, de la culture alimentaire et des systèmes alimentaires devraient être accessibles au public et largement partagées. La création de la revue était aussi importante pour le développement continu des études sur l’alimentation en tant que domaine, de même que pour la mise en lumière des particularités de l’alimentation et des systèmes alimentaires au Canada et dans les territoires autochtones. Placer ces connaissances derrière un accès payant semblait contradictoire, en particulier dans le contexte où la majorité de nos recherches sont financées directement ou indirectement par le public.

La plateforme Open Journals System (OJS) que nous avons adoptée comme moteur de publication a rendu le libre accès réalisable. Créé par le [Public Knowledge Project](#) de l'Université Simon Fraser, OJS est utilisé par plus de revues dans le monde que n'importe quel autre logiciel d'édition scientifique : aujourd'hui, plus de 30 000 revues dans 150 pays s'en servent (Public Knowledge Project, 2024). OJS et ses revues membres créent et échangent de nouvelles conceptions sur la manière dont la recherche universitaire devrait être partagée. Le contexte plus large du libre accès est ainsi devenu un mouvement et une communauté de pratique, liée par une compréhension commune des fondements de l'« économie morale » du savoir (Bacevic et Muellerleile, 2018). En faisant partie de cette communauté, CFS/RCÉA contribue à une conversation plus large sur la démocratie, l'accessibilité et l'ouverture dans le milieu universitaire, et elle en bénéficie. Cela concerne autant la façon dont la recherche est évaluée et légitimée par les pairs que les façons dont les connaissances devraient être recueillies et diffusées, en passant par le crédit qui devrait être accordé aux collaborateurs de recherche, aux coauteurs, aux évaluateurs, aux rédacteurs en chef de revues, aux réviseurs. Le libre accès consiste à mettre des articles à la disposition du lectorat, mais il s'agit tout autant d'un état d'esprit visant à décentraliser le pouvoir et à contribuer à la décolonisation et à la démocratisation des fondements de l'université.

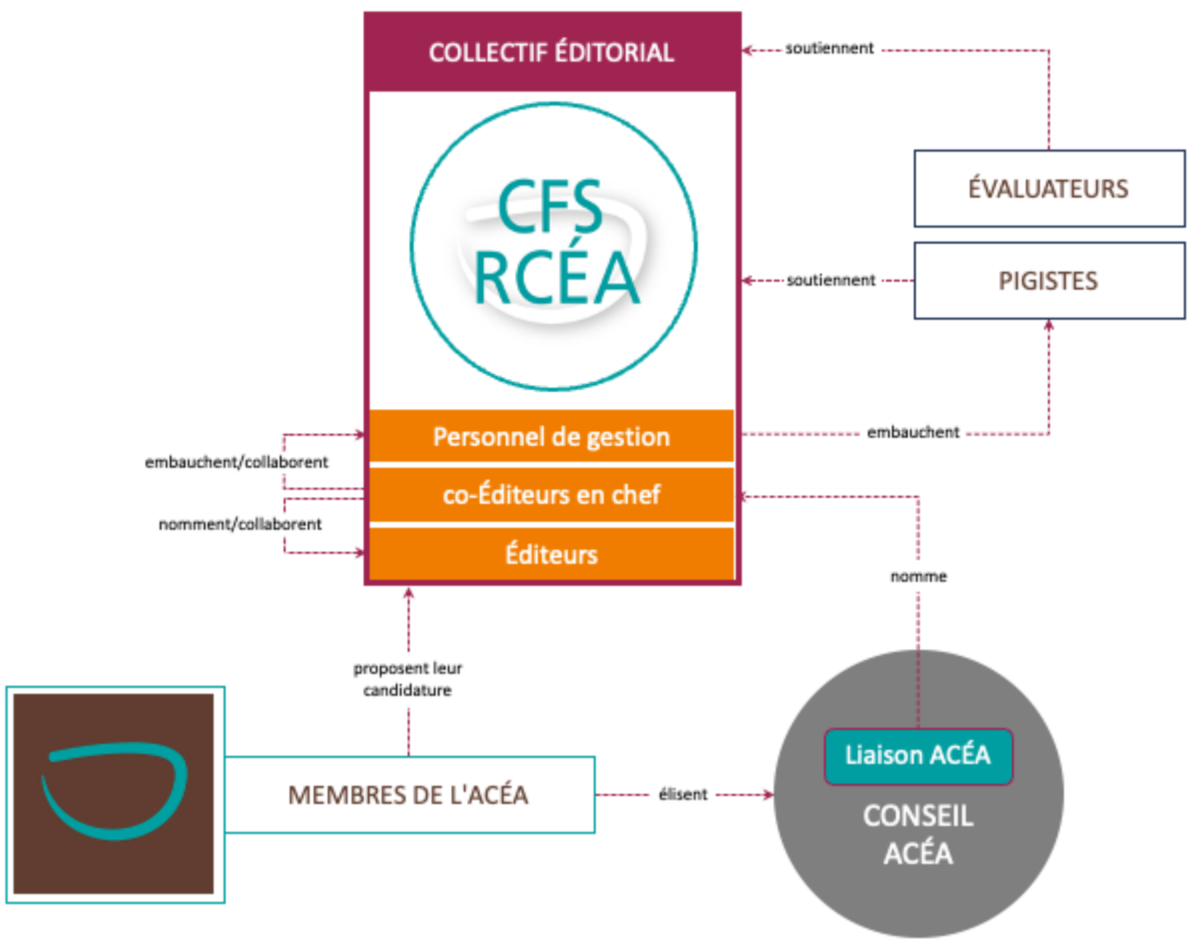
L'éthos de l'ACÉA/CAFS et la position éthico-politique du libre accès convergent dans CFS/RCÉA, inspirant les principes que nous suivons et les perspectives que nous adoptons aujourd'hui. Il s'agit notamment de maintenir des normes élevées pour les travaux que nous publions, tout en rendant le processus d'examen et de révision plus respectueux pour les auteurs, en en faisant une occasion de développer et d'affiner les idées. Cela signifie également que nous célébrons et encourageons les publications qui prennent des formes autres que les articles de recherche conventionnels, y compris les textes de point de vue et d'analyse, les rapports de terrain, les travaux audiovisuels et artistiques. En outre, ces types de publications contribuent à élargir la manière dont les connaissances sur l'alimentation et les systèmes alimentaires sont valorisées, ainsi que le vivier de personnes qui produisent ces connaissances. Parallèlement, notre barème de frais de publication progressif est conçu pour rendre la publication dans CFS/RCÉA abordable, quelle que soit la situation économique de chacun, tout en assurant la viabilité financière de la revue. Si l'accessibilité à la publication dans la revue est une priorité absolue, la rémunération de notre personnel pour son temps, ses connaissances et ses compétences l'est tout autant. Nous pensons que ce modèle, conjointement avec le programme d'aide aux revues savantes du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines, a atteint le bon équilibre.

Notre exposition à la communauté du libre accès et nos interactions avec certains de ses acteurs[4] ont également contribué à renforcer la structure interne de la revue, y compris notre modèle de gouvernance et l'élaboration de politiques et de protocoles pour l'intégrité académique, l'organisation du travail et les communications. Nous avons mis en place une structure de gouvernance qui privilégie les processus collectifs et ouverts, et qui implique le conseil d'administration de l'ACÉA/CAFS et ses membres, les

[4] Par exemple : Directory of Open Access Journals, Humanities and Social Science Commons, Rebus Foundation ou SPARC.

rédactrices et rédacteurs en chef ainsi que les directrices et directeurs de publication, et le personnel administratif (voir la figure 1). L'empathie et la confiance vont de pair avec une gestion rigoureuse de l'édition et de la production. Par ailleurs, la promotion par les médias sociaux nous aide à atteindre des publics au-delà de la communauté universitaire et des études sur l'alimentation. Comme nous le savons trop bien, le monde universitaire comprend de nombreux défis systémiques, y compris l'oppression et l'exclusion de certaines voix et l'importance excessive accordée à d'autres. C'est pourquoi il est si important de faire partie de l'écosystème du libre accès : celui-ci permet d'apporter des réponses systémiques à des problèmes systémiques.

Figure 1 : L'organigramme de CFS/RCÉA



Caractéristiques des publications à ce jour

Au cours de la dernière décennie, CFS/RCÉA a publié 27 numéros pour un total de 364 articles. En parcourant les archives, il est possible de voir l'évolution de la revue à travers les thèmes abordés. Les premiers numéros portaient sur la définition des études sur l'alimentation en tant que domaine de recherche au Canada et dans les territoires autochtones. Puis, en 2016 et 2017, le thème de l'évolution du champ a été abordé directement et depuis, il est resté omniprésent. En 2018, la revue a commencé à s'engager plus explicitement dans des perspectives d'exclusion systémique, en particulier celles des chercheurs et chercheuses et des praticiens et praticiennes féministes et autochtones. Au fil du temps, la revue a mûri, l'éventail des sujets abordés devenant de plus en plus large et diversifié. Malgré cette diversité, quelques termes clés sont régulièrement mis à l'avant-scène, suggérant certaines convergences au sein de notre communauté, si ce n'est un sens singulier de la synthèse. Ces termes reviennent fréquemment dans les titres des publications et des numéros, ainsi que dans nos introductions et nos éditoriaux. Ils sous-tendent, délimitent ou enveloppent les autres.

Ouvert

Les 27 numéros publiés au cours des 10 dernières années couvrent un large éventail de disciplines et de formes d'expression, y compris l'image de couverture reproduisant d'une affiche entièrement faite de chocolat (réalisée par Luciana Godoy, professeure de cuisine et candidate au doctorat [2021][5]). Le fait que l'affiche ait finalement été partagée et mangée témoigne de l'ouverture d'esprit de la revue en matière de consommation de contenu.

Collaboration

Dans les études sur l'alimentation, le travail ne se fait pas de manière isolée ni dans des départements cloisonnés. De nombreuses publications de CFS/RCÉA sont le fruit d'une collaboration entre des professeurs et des étudiants, des chercheurs autochtones et allochtones, et des chercheurs et des praticiens. Les auteurs collaborent entre eux et avec la communauté, mais ils s'efforcent également d'expliciter ce à quoi la collaboration ressemble dans la pratique et ce qu'elle permet de ressentir, y compris les obstacles à surmonter et les relations à tisser. Comme l'écrivent les membres du collectif RAIR[6], « ce travail de responsabilisation relationnelle est une forme de "travail sur le terrain" [*field work*] – ou de "travail sur les sentiments" [*feels work*] comme l'appellent certains de nos membres » (Kepkiewicz et al., 2023, p. 13).

Transition

Les contributeurs de CFS/RCÉA se sont engagés à documenter et à défendre le changement dans les systèmes alimentaires – y compris dans la perspective du féminisme poststructuraliste, de l'antiracisme, de la recherche intégrée aux arts, de l'écologie politique, des études culturelles, de la géographie humaine et des modes de connaissance autochtones, pour ne nommer que quelques approches. Et, bien que le changement puisse être positif et que des possibilités soient explorées pour des systèmes alimentaires plus justes, durables et sains, nos auteurs et autrices prennent soin de délimiter

[5] On peut consulter une image de l'affiche à l'adresse suivante : https://canadianfoodstudies.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cfs/issue/view/29.
[6] RAIR est le collectif Relational Accountability for Indigenous Rematriation.

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les tensions et les luttes, les évolutions préoccupantes et les récits parfois contestables qui peuvent accompagner nos meilleurs efforts. Ryan Katz-Rosene (2020), par exemple, note les appels de plus en plus nombreux à une « transition alimentaire mondiale » pour sauver la planète et améliorer la santé humaine (p. 5). Mais, demande-t-il, cela signifie-t-il que nous devons tous cesser de manger de la viande et des produits laitiers et oublier cette « distraction romantique » qu'est l'alimentation locale ?

Pédagogie

En 2016, Jennifer Sumner (2016) a observé que « les personnes qui étudient l'apprentissage n'ont pas souvent tourné leur regard vers l'alimentation, tandis que ceux et celles qui étudient l'alimentation ont généralement négligé l'apprentissage qui y est associé » (p. xix). Le nombre considérable d'articles centrés sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, y compris une section thématique spéciale dans le numéro 8.4 (2021, « Food Pedagogies in Canada »), permet de nuancer cette déclaration incisive. Les auteurs s'engagent dans une pédagogie de l'alimentation réflexive et critique et participent au « tournant pédagogique » (Flowers et Swan, 2012, p. 424), élargissant, comme l'écrit Ellyse Winter (2020), « la définition de la pédagogie pour inclure les espaces et les sites d'enseignement et d'apprentissage en dehors du système d'éducation officiel » (p. 132).

Perspectives d'avenir

Alors que le monde de l'édition académique devient de plus en plus achalandé, compliqué et trouble, nous espérons que CFS/RCÉA continuera à être un point de rencontre et un espace de prise de risque pour les chercheurs et chercheuses communautaires et académiques, les praticiens et praticiennes de l'alimentation, les activistes, les artistes et les créateurs de médias. Le domaine interdisciplinaire des études sur l'alimentation s'est considérablement développé et a évolué au cours de la dernière décennie, et CFS/RCÉA s'est efforcé de créer un espace pour diverses idées, personnes et approches afin de réfléchir et de s'engager de manière critique dans des idées et des actions liées à l'alimentation et aux systèmes alimentaires dans le monde humain et le monde plus qu'humain (more-than-human). En plus de publier des articles de recherche et de synthèse de grande qualité, tout en nous appuyant sur ce qui a déjà été accompli, nous visons à faire de CFS/RCÉA un espace pour des formes nouvelles et créatives d'études sur l'alimentation et les systèmes alimentaires.

Les études sur l'alimentation et le monde qui nous entoure continueront d'évoluer, tout comme CFS/RCÉA. À l'avenir, la revue veillera à rester fidèle à ses valeurs, mais aussi flexible et ouverte à de nouvelles idées et de nouveaux processus. Les revues scientifiques doivent être plus qu'un répertoire des recherches universitaires et un véhicule pour l'avancement professionnel. Alors que le monde académique s'enracine de plus en plus dans les structures politico-économiques dominantes et que les universités et les collèges sont aux prises avec leurs mandats et objectifs, les espaces de pensée critique, de rigueur et de créativité tels que ceux de CFS/RCÉA doivent être défendus. Dans une critique cinglante des établissements d'enseignement supérieur qui se subordonnent aux valeurs des entreprises et du marché, Henry Giroux (2017) affirme que « les éducateurs doivent entamer une conversation nationale dans laquelle la salle de classe est défendue comme un lieu de recherche délibérative et de pensée critique, un lieu qui fait appel à l'imagination radicale et au sens du courage civique ». Les revues savantes sont à l'avant-garde de ce changement et jouent un rôle essentiel dans les discussions, les débats et l'opposition en vue de créer des sociétés plus justes et plus équitables.

De nombreuses revues comme CFS/RCÉA ont du mal à gérer les tâches liées à la gestion d'une publication en libre accès à but non lucratif. Alors que les universitaires titulaires bénéficiant de la sécurité d'emploi peuvent souvent se consacrer à une part du travail (par exemple, la direction, l'édition, l'évaluation par les pairs), les tâches administratives essentielles nécessitent un ensemble de compétences et de connaissances spécialisées (par exemple, la coordination, la révision, la mise en page, le travail informatique, les communications). Or, il est de plus en plus difficile de trouver le financement nécessaire pour soutenir le personnel qui en est responsable. Le défi est d'autant plus grand que le monde de l'édition universitaire devient de plus en plus assourdissant et désorganisé, avec un contenu de plus en plus important publié plus rapidement et de manière plus chaotique. Alors que le domaine de l'édition est dominé par quelques grandes entreprises, de nouvelles revues voient le jour à un rythme effréné. Il devient donc toujours plus complexe de déterminer lesquelles sont légitimes et lesquelles sont négligentes et lesquelles ne le sont pas, se contentant de profiter du travail universitaire financé par des fonds publics. Certaines, souvent gérées par des conglomérats dont les intérêts principaux sont financiers, ne se soucient guère d'encourager et de soutenir le débat critique. Dans ces revues, la précipitation et le caractère négligé de l'évaluation par les pairs et de la prise de décision sont évidents, car elles privilégient le volume au détriment de la qualité du contenu. Plus inquiétant encore, certaines entreprises disposant d'un grand nombre de revues en libre accès ont modifié leur modèle de revenus, passant des frais de publication et des abonnements au commerce des données de publication. Ces informations ont commencé à devenir un moyen pour les établissements universitaires de prendre des décisions quant au recrutement ainsi qu'au financement ou à la suppression des programmes de recherche et d'établir des priorités pour les orientations futures des facultés et des départements (Aspesi et al., 2019).

Conclusion

La bonne nouvelle est que les institutions de financement au Canada et dans le monde s'engagent de plus en plus en faveur de la publication en libre accès, ce qui ouvre de grandes possibilités pour des revues telles que CFS/RCÉA. Cependant, cela comporte également des risques quant à la qualité du processus éditorial.

Nous continuerons à travailler pour nous assurer que la communauté de la recherche au Canada et dans les territoires autochtones a accès à un espace de publication en libre accès qui fait rayonner leur travail, tout en veillant à ce que les chercheurs et chercheuses en études sur l'alimentation puissent publier de manière à échanger des idées riches, nouvelles et variées.

Nous conclurons en exprimant notre gratitude à la communauté de la revue CFS/RCÉA, notamment à ses lecteurs et lectrices, ses auteurs et autrices, ses créateurs et créatrices, ses évaluateurs et évaluatrices et ses réviseurs et réviseures. Ensemble, nous faisons de cette revue un lieu de recherche rigoureuse et différente.

Dr Rachel Engler-Stringer est professeure au Département de santé communautaire et d'épidémiologie du Collège de médecine de la University of Saskatchewan et chercheuse à la Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit. Ses intérêts de recherche touchent les programmes d'alimentation scolaire, la sécurité alimentaire des communautés, les environnements alimentaires et l'accès à la nourriture, la promotion de la santé et la recherche communautaire et participative.

Laurence Godin est professeure adjointe au Département de sociologie de l'Université Laval et chercheuse au Centre NUTRISS – Nutrition, santé et société. Ses travaux se concentrent sur la consommation durable, la sociologie de l'alimentation et les inégalités sociales. Elle s'intéresse particulièrement à la manière dont alimentation, durabilité et inégalités se croisent dans les ménages et leur vie quotidienne, ainsi qu'aux dynamiques de transformation des pratiques quotidiennes.

Charles Z. Levkoe est titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada sur les systèmes alimentaires équitables et durables, membre du Collège de nouveaux chercheurs et créateurs en art et en science de la Société royale du Canada et professeur au Département des sciences de la santé de Lakehead University. Ses recherches axées sur l'engagement communautaire utilisent la perspective des systèmes alimentaires pour mieux comprendre l'importance de la justice sociale, de la régénération écologique, des économies régionales et de l'engagement démocratique actif, ainsi que les liens entre ces éléments.

Alexia Moyer est titulaire d'un doctorat en études anglaises de l'Université de Montréal et, avec le soutien financier du FRQSC, elle a réalisé un postdoctorat au Département d'anglais et à l'Institut d'études canadiennes de l'Université McGill. Forte de son parcours en études littéraires, en études culturelles et en études alimentaires, elle écrit sur les livres de cuisine, les récits gastronomiques, les histoires culinaires et d'autres formes de littérature culinaire. Elle dirige le collectif de réviseures et de traductrices savantes redline-lignerouge.

David Szanto est un chercheur indépendant qui travaille sur la culture et les systèmes alimentaires. Il agit à titre d'enseignant, de chercheur, de rédacteur et d'expert-conseil pour diverses institutions au Canada, en Europe, aux États-Unis et en Australie, et a beaucoup écrit sur l'alimentation, le design, la performance et l'écologie. Il est l'animateur et le producteur du balado *Making a Meal of It* et a co-dirigé deux ouvrages collectifs en libre accès : *Food studies: Matter, meaning, movement* et *Showing theory to know theory: Understanding social science concepts through illustrative vignettes*.

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Commentary

Urgency to secure funding for the promised national school food program amidst the rise of food costs and chronic disease

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Abstract

An overwhelming number of Canadians believe that a national school food program (SFP) would benefit children, but concerns around limited funding are frequently raised. SFPs across Canada are struggling to meet increasing demands due to rising food costs, meaning that food quality and quantity within existing SFPs are suffering. This paper discusses the urgency to implement a cost-shared and federally funded SFP amidst the current economic context and lack of clear direction from the federal government. The paper also explores ways in which federal funding for school meals can help to reduce the rate of chronic diseases and actualize many proven physical and mental health benefits for Canadians, all of which have positive and long-term downstream effects on the country's economy.

Keywords: Public health; population health; child health; access to healthy foods; nutrition policy; school food; chronic disease

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Résumé

Un nombre considérable de Canadiens et Canadiennes pensent qu'un programme national d'alimentation scolaire (PAS) serait bénéfique pour les enfants, mais des préoccupations sont fréquemment soulevées à propos des limites du financement. Partout au Canada, les PAS s'efforcent de répondre à une demande croissante en raison de l'augmentation du coût des aliments, ce qui signifie que la qualité et la quantité des denrées alimentaires offertes par ces programmes en pâtissent. Cet article traite de l'urgence, dans le contexte économique actuel et en l'absence d'une orientation claire de la part du gouvernement fédéral, de mettre en œuvre un PAS à coûts partagés et financé par le gouvernement fédéral. Il explore également les moyens par lesquels le financement fédéral des repas scolaires peut contribuer à réduire le taux de maladies chroniques et à faire advenir de nombreux bienfaits reconnus pour la santé physique et mentale des Canadiens et Canadiennes, le tout ayant des effets positifs à long terme sur l'économie du pays.

Introduction

In 2019, the management of chronic diseases made up over 67% of healthcare costs in Canada, and the economic cost is growing (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2019; Maximova et al., 2022). School food programs (SFPs) give rise to benefits across many sectors, with some of the most prominent related to nutrition and health (Cohen et al., 2021; Stern et al., 2022). Nutrition has direct implications for reducing the incidence and prevalence of chronic diseases and, by extension, the costs of these diseases. SFPs also provide relief to families' household budgets in the short- and mid-term, which is of relevance given the current climate of soaring food costs (Ruetz et al., 2023).

Due to the challenges of insufficient federal funding and rising food costs, SFPs across Canada will face ongoing difficulties in meeting growing demands and providing children access to nutritious foods. The myriad benefits of SFPs indicate that these programs are a cost-effective federal investment to be prioritized immediately, such that a National School Food Policy and program can be established in 2024. Persistent delays will hinder efforts to improve the health and futures of Canadians. The following commentary discusses the ways in which SFPs support children's and families' overall wellbeing through short- and long-term means and emphasizes the urgency for timely development of a national SFP.

Canada lags behind

Canada remains the only G7 country without a national SFP. Municipal and provincial/territorial governments, few federal government departments, and non-governmental organizations support an inconsistent patchwork of programs across Canada (Godin et al., 2017; Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). In 2021, the government promised Canadians a "national school nutritious meal program" (Liberal Party of Canada, 2021a); in 2022, they held a consultation with stakeholders to share their experiences with school meals and perspectives on objectives for a school food policy (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022).

In 2023, the Government of Canada released the *What We Heard* report, reflecting stakeholder opinions (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022). An astonishing 96% of participants supported a national SFP and believed it would benefit children, but concerns around limited funding were raised repeatedly. Limited funding was perceived to prevent the efficacy of school food delivery, including insufficient paid staffing, development of safe infrastructure, universality, equipment, administration, and inability to address gas costs for rural communities. The federal government was never reported as a top source of funding for participating SFPs. Despite the Government of Canada's unfunded pledge in 2019, followed by the Liberal Party of Canada's re-election campaign commitment of one billion dollars toward a national SFP over five years, the 2023 federal budget did not mention school food (Government of Canada, 2019, 2023; Liberal Party of Canada, 2021b).

Urgency for a national program

SFPs across Canada are struggling to meet growing demands. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of up to 40% increased demand is typical (Barghiel, 2023). SFPs receive funding from disparate sources, with volunteers working relentlessly to organize meals (CBC News, 2023; Haines & Ruetz, 2020). Yet organizers are finding it increasingly difficult to stretch finances, particularly in developing menus that accommodate allergies and dietary restrictions. The increasing demand for SFPs has been largely attributed to rising food costs, with prices persistently overrunning inflation in the preceding year (Barghiel, 2023). In 2022, one in four (1.8 million) Canadian children lived in a food-insecure household, increased from one in five (1.4 million) in 2021 (PROOF, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023). In Ontario, SFP providers indicated that their food expenses increased by 40% to 80% since 2020 (Barghiel, 2023).

Budget restrictions cause food quality reductions within SFPs. Some programs have unwillingly reduced their provision of fruits and vegetables, substituting them for affordable grains. Other programs have reduced the number of meals, and some transitioned to providing only snacks (Barghiel, 2023). Poor diet quality in childhood has countless downstream effects that can compromise the health and wellbeing of populations.

Chronic diseases can be largely attributed to diet quality

The incidence and prevalence of chronic diseases in Canada are predicted to continually increase, along with their associated economic challenges (Maximova et al., 2022). According to the 2017 Global Burden of Disease study, low diet quality was responsible for the largest proportion of diseases and the most deaths globally, implying that diet quality is a significant modifiable risk factor for disease (Maximova et al., 2022). Enhancing diet quality via SFPs can serve as a high-potential preventive measure against chronic diseases.

School food programs improve diet quality through nutrition standards

Nutrition standards for school meals promote the intake of a nutritious diet. School-provided meals have been shown to be more nutritious compared to home-packed meals in countries including the United Kingdom (Evans et al., 2012; Hur et al., 2011) and the United States (Caruso & Cullen, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2014). A nutritious diet during childhood has important long-term health implications, including the prevention of chronic diseases. Implementing a national SFP today would guarantee the provision of quality foods and be an economically effective health-promotion measure that can reduce healthcare costs caused by preventable low diet quality.

A healthier tomorrow starts today

Low diet quality has strong negative effects on the health of our children, their future children, and the country's human capital (Baltag et al., 2022). In the United States, a community fund was introduced to provide schools in lower socioeconomic communities with additional funding to transition to universal free school meals. Within eligible schools, participation in meal programs increased, and students showed improved academic performance (Marcus & Yewell, 2022). Dietary patterns are established young and track into adulthood, often influencing adult health outcomes. This emphasizes the importance of early life interventions like SPFs to set children up for good health in later life (Lioret et al., 2020; Lundborg et al., 2022).

Low diet quality in childhood can compromise musculoskeletal growth, cardiorespiratory health, neurodevelopment, and immunity in children, collectively increasing the risk of developing chronic diseases (Baltag et al., 2022). In a systematic review examining associations between universal SFPs and student outcomes, SFPs with strong nutrition guidelines supported children in attaining adequate nutrition and improved physical health outcomes like BMI (Cohen et al., 2021). SFPs also help to improve mental health. The Hospital for Sick Children indicated that many youths experienced harm to their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cost et al., 2022). Negative impacts were greater for school-aged children, underscoring the importance of in-class interactions and shared activities for children (Cost et al., 2022). Cultivating positive eating behaviors and a sense of social cohesion through SFPs can help children alleviate feelings of depression, boost mental wellbeing, and minimize their risk of experiencing mental health difficulties as adults (Arvidsson et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2017).

School food programs leverage health equity

The *What We Heard* report states that a government priority is "to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life" (Government of Canada, 2023). The universal provision of school food through federal funding can help reduce inequities in diet quality and create a more equitable society that prioritizes the cultivation of every child's highest potential (Dacunha et al., 2022). Through guaranteed nutritious school food, more children will have more equal opportunities for improved educational, physical, mental, and employment outcomes (Illøkken et al., 2021; Marmot, 2020; Vik et al., 2019). As today's children grow into future leaders, prioritizing their health will benefit society's collective wellbeing in the long run. In a time where household financial challenges are increasing, the implementation of a national SFP can provide young Canadians across the socioeconomic spectrum the key nourishment, food knowledge, and social skills needed to live a healthier life.

Household financial relief in the short- and mid-term

Significant increases in food costs have made life more difficult for many, with more Canadians managing multiple jobs to stay afloat (Mullin & Antle, 2024). Universal free school meals could save families up to $189 per child on grocery bills every month, and families with two children could save up to $3,780 per school year (Ruetz et al., 2023). School meals have the potential to put money back into the pockets of Canadians. This extra money can help families better keep up with increased costs of living and enable them to afford healthy meals for their children outside of school (Ruetz et al., 2023).

In Sweden, families saw a household income increase of 2.6% after participation in a universal free school lunch program (Lundborg et al., 2022). This increase was unrelated to reduced food expenditures, suggesting that school meals not only generate financial benefits in the short-term, but also in the mid-term (Ruetz et al., 2023). In today's challenging economic climate, the cost-saving potential of a national SFP should be recognized and realized/enacted.

Return on investment of school food programs

SFPs are cost-effective investments that deliver significant long-term gains. A one-dollar investment in chronic disease prevention through SFPs can result in four to five dollars in cost savings due to reduced healthcare expenditures (Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention, 2016). In 2022, a return on investment study about SFPs found a $40 billion USD return per year in human health and economic benefits through decreases in diet-related diseases, poverty, and food insecurity, in exchange for an annual $19 billion investment. The study found that the transition to universal free school meal policies could lead to an additional $7.5 billion annual return on investment (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2021).

Conclusion

The development of a National School Food Policy continues to be framed as important by the Government of Canada, yet it is not known when the establishment of such policy is expected, despite heightening pressures felt by SFPs and families. While the federal government has promoted the value of a National School Food Policy and program, they have not provided a clear plan moving forward, despite a short window remaining for its implementation. Overall, federal funding can improve long-term physical and mental health, as well as provide household budget relief to families in the short- and mid-term. A national SFP is the primary vehicle through which the objectives of the imminent National School Food Policy will be met, and it will help stabilize funding amidst rising food costs. More must be done to expand access to SFPs in Canada amid growing urgency to provide support. Acknowledging the substantial returns on investment provided by a national SFP, such an investment stands as a fiscally-responsible policy choice. A federal investment in SFPs today means that more children, our leaders of tomorrow, will be able to reach their fullest potential.

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Eric Ng (he/him) is an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto. He's also a PhD Candidate in Policy Studies Toronto Metropolitan University. His teaching and research focus on neoliberalism in social policy and how health professions can advance social justice in their everyday practice.

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Perspective

Reimagining recipes for food studies: Enriching—not spoiling—the broth

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Abstract

This perspective is a continuation of a conversation started during "Reimagining Food, Food Systems, and Food Studies," a plenary session in which we, the authors, participated at the eighteenth annual assembly of the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS). Assessing current opportunities and limitations for food studies in Canada from our perspectives as emerging scholars, the CAFS panel presented our individual and collective proposals for evolving the field. This article builds on the resonances and dissonances from our discussion to craft a provisional "recipe" for reimagining food studies. Recognizing the shortcomings of the format in terms of its prescriptive connotations, we position *recipes* not as rigid guidelines for achieving predefined outcomes, but as creative models for generating improvisations. We begin with an overview of the ingredients that have come together to create food studies in Canada. Next, we offer some revisions in the margins of this recipe based on the work in which we are engaged as food scholars and practitioners. Finally, we consider next steps for the work of evolving the field, and we invite readers to share in this exchange. Overall, we

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observe and participate in an unfinished trajectory that extends from previous questions on *why* food studies should exist and *what* food studies is, to consider more deeply *how* food studies could be done.

Keywords: Food studies; collaborative scholarship; knowledge diversity; research methodologies; food systems

Résumé

Cet article de perspective s'inscrit dans la continuité d'une conversation entamée lors de la session plénière « Réimaginer l'alimentation, les systèmes alimentaires et les études sur l'alimentation », à laquelle nous, les auteurs et auteures, avons participé lors de la dix-huitième assemblée annuelle de l'Association canadienne des études sur l'alimentation (ACEA). Après avoir évalué les possibilités et les limites actuelles pour les études sur l'alimentation au Canada de nos points de vue de chercheuses et chercheurs émergents, le panel de l'ACEA a permis de présenter nos propositions individuelles et collectives pour faire évoluer le domaine. Cet article s'appuie sur les résonances et les dissonances de notre discussion pour élaborer une « recette » provisoire pour réimaginer les études sur l'alimentation. Reconnaissant les lacunes de ce format étant donné ses connotations prescriptives, nous considérons ici les *recettes* non pas comme des lignes directrices rigides pour atteindre des résultats prédéfinis, mais comme des modèles créatifs pour générer de l'improvisation. Nous commençons par un survol des ingrédients réunis pour créer les études sur l'alimentation au Canada. Ensuite, nous proposons une petite révision dans les marges de cette recette, en fonction du travail dans lequel nous nous engageons en tant que chercheurs, chercheuses et praticiens, praticiennes de l'alimentation. Enfin, nous envisageons les prochaines étapes de l'évolution du domaine et nous invitons les lecteurs et lectrices à participer à cet échange. Dans l'ensemble, ce que nous observons et à quoi nous participons est une trajectoire inachevée qui s'étend des questions antérieures sur la raison d'être et la nature des études sur l'alimentation à une réflexion plus approfondie sur la manière dont les études sur l'alimentation pourraient être réalisées.

Introduction

"Too many cooks spoil the broth." "Trop de cuisiniers gâtent la sauce." Across several cultures and languages,[1] variations on this expression are widely used outside of food-specific contexts to offer notes of caution about the poor or diluted results that may be produced from processes that incorporate the competing perspectives of multiple people. From our positions as food scholars, we question this advice. Food reminds us of our interdependence as eaters and academics. Just as we can never be alone when we eat, since we are in intimate exchange with other organisms (Derrida, 1991), we are necessarily in a community when we make scholarship,

[1] For a selection of similar expressions, see, for instance, BBC Learning English's (2017) "We say—you say: Too many cooks spoil the broth": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoW1DZTQhHA.

building with the work of other knowledge-sharers. While some dishes may benefit from the discerning hand of a singular chef, we argue that the field of food studies is a broth best cooked by many participants bringing diverse ingredients.

This written piece is a continuation of a conversation started during "Reimagining Food, Food Systems, and Food Studies," a plenary session in which we, the authors, participated as part of the eighteenth annual assembly of the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) on May 31, 2023, at York University in Toronto. As the organizer and moderator of the session, David Szanto animated the discussion with four main questions: (1) What word/concept would you use to describe reimagined food systems? (2) What word/concept would you like to introduce into food studies discourse to prompt reimagined ways of doing academic food work? (3) How do you personally put that word/concept into practice in your work? (4) Concretely, what would need to happen for others to do the same? Consciously foregrounding the work of emerging scholars as new voices in the field, the plenary intended to move analytical attention "from what *is* to what *could be*" (Ryan & Szanto, 2023, p. 10).

After the conference, we were inspired to continue this collaborative speculation on the future of food studies. While we draw from our work in the territories of so-called Canada, we situate our studies of local, particular food practices in relation to global entanglements, including those related to climatic, political, and migratory upheavals. We also acknowledge that some of us participate in Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaboration, while others examine transnational movements of people and food. The notion of "Canadian" food studies should therefore be construed less as a set of currents or practices bounded by political definitions of nationhood, and more as emergent from the perspectives we collectively comprise, and which are influenced by our diverse experiences within Canadian geographies. Here, we put forward a collective, polyvocal vision for how our field might contribute to a broader project of addressing the intertwined elements of contemporary "polycrisis" (Morin & Kern, 1999; Tooze, 2022), including climate emergencies, economic collapses, interpersonal violence, and other mutually influential issues. We do so with the recognition that these intersecting challenges require pluralistic responses if nourishing and locally meaningful relationships are to be rewoven in their place (James et al., 2021). Even as our overarching hope for reimagined food systems has brought us into dialogue, our ideas on the ways in which food studies ought to tackle ongoing challenges are not uniform. Nevertheless, we welcome both the alignments and the misalignments in our viewpoints, considering them to be a necessary part of making change (Rosol et al., 2022).

Working with a familiar, food-related format, we write our article as a recipe. At the same time, we recognise that recipes can embody colonial order and "naturalize ideologies of capitalist progress" through their "step-by-step," prescriptive form (Yusupov et al., 2023, p. 75). Cognizant of this limitation, we include in our definition of *recipe* a variety of knowledge-sharing activities (e.g., community cookbooks, familial traditions, performance scripts, place-based teachings, philosophical explorations, speculative narratives, etc.) in addition to published, written instructions (Heldke, 1988; La communauté anicinabe de Lac Simon, 2023; Marinetti, 1932/2014; Martin, 2005; Tait Neufeld & Finnis, 2022). As such, we position recipes not as rigid guidelines for achieving predefined outcomes, but as creative models for generating improvisations.

We locate this perspective piece as a continuation of an evolving body of work in food studies in Canada, which has been shared in this journal, the annual meetings of CAFS, and elsewhere (Anderson et al., 2016;

Koç et al., 2022; Power & Koç, 2008). We begin with a brief overview of the ingredients that have come together to create food studies in Canada. Next, we propose some revisions in the margins of this recipe based on the work in which we are engaged as food scholars and practitioners. Finally, we consider next steps for reimagining food studies, and we invite readers to share in this exchange. Overall, we observe and participate in an unfinished trajectory that extends from previous questions on *why* food studies should exist (Power & Koç, 2008) and *what* food studies is (Brady et al., 2015) to consider more deeply *how* food studies could be done.

The existing recipe

Food studies explores foods and their pathways from lands and waters to mouths and bodies, and back again. Is it thus an exploration of relationships and systems, of material-discursive transformations and movements. In Canada, food studies emerged from academic and non-academic examinations in the mid-1970s that considered food's intersections with politics, economics, activism, folklore, and history (Koç et al., 2012). From there, it became an innovative and transdisciplinary field, growing to include multiple areas of knowledge and ways of knowing (Friedmann, 2012), as well as gradually increasing attention to the physical-sensorial matter of food and the visceral-affective-emotional responses that it therefore engenders in eaters (including those who study it) (Durocher & Knezevic, 2023). The Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) was created in 2005 to bring into conversation scholars and practitioners from various academic and social backgrounds. Today, CAFS represents a vibrant group of knowledge-sharers across Canada and beyond (CAFS, n.d.). Acknowledging that the following list is not exhaustive, we outline key steps that come together to create a recipe for food studies in its current form.

Step 1: Melt a cup of *transdisciplinarity*

As a *transdisciplinary* field, food studies crosses boundaries between different academic departments, and joins academic and non-academic spaces including civil society, government, and industry (Anderson et al., 2016; Levkoe, 2014; MacRae, 2023). In recent years, food studies has expanded beyond its initial leanings toward the social sciences to be enriched by greater participation from people working in scholarly, professional, and community-based roles in the arts, humanities, and natural sciences (Szanto et al., 2022). This cross-fertilization is reflected in the systems approach that is central to the field; rather than examining issues in isolation, researchers situate foods and food practices in relation to broader cultural and material contexts (Andrée et al., 2019). As Tompkins (2012) notes, "a shift to a framework we might call *critical eating studies*" (p. 2) may help to underscore the *foodness* of food studies, rather than a commodified or abstracted notion of food.

The plurality of food studies is not without its challenges. As scholarly institutions and journals are generally organized around disciplines, the pursuit of inter- and transdisciplinary work can bring risks for emerging scholars who are seeking to share research and to find intellectual homes (Johnston, 2008).

Nevertheless, CAFS continues to facilitate collaborations (including this very article), which demonstrate the value of cultivating community across divides.

Step 2: Stir in a tablespoon of *critique*

A common trope in the food studies literature positions food as a *critical* "lens" that researchers use to reveal the ecological, political, economic, and sociocultural dynamics that make up the world, particularly those arrangements that are informed by power. This perspective follows from traditions of critical theory in that it seeks to understand the histories and relationships that give rise to certain structures, rather than accepting current circumstances as given and unchangeable (Ruder et al., 2022; Speakman et al., 2022). Food studies is thus inherently a politicized field.

Accordingly, these "lenses" have also been turned back on research and researchers, as the field has become increasingly reflexive over the past two decades (Levkoe et al., 2020). Notably, food studies grapples with its participation in ongoing patterns of research extraction wherein colonial institutions benefit from the knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities, particularly in settler colonial contexts like Canada. While the work of decolonization is unfinished, researchers and institutions are learning to make space for multiple ways of seeing through food (Deawuo & Classens, 2023; Mustapha & Masanganise, 2023; Settee & Shukla, 2020).

Step 3: Heat to a simmering *transformation*

The critical perspective assesses the strengths and weaknesses of food systems not only for the sake of descriptive reflection, but also in the interest of identifying potential *transformations* (James et al., 2021). Paying attention to inequities in relation to ability, age, body size, citizenship, class, gender, race, sexuality, and other categories of distinction, researchers work to empower actors who have been historically marginalized by the dominant, global "food regime" (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). More than an academic conversation, food studies intends to inspire and to put into action meaningful change on the ground (Andrée et al., 2018; Knezevic et al., 2017).

Much remains to be done. As became clear during the heart of the COVID pandemic alongside the ongoing killings of Black and Indigenous people, globally integrated supply chains are a fragile network on which to depend. Disruptions can shut down entire channels of food provisioning without recourse, affecting marginalized communities disproportionately (Lowitt et al., 2022; Weiler & Encalada Grez, 2022). Even as such routes have reopened, food systems remain poised to contribute to future emergencies as environmentally intensive practices erode the intertwined cultures and ecologies that nourish planetary resilience. Food studies' commitment to innovative and transformative work is more urgent than ever (Dale et al., 2021; Taylor & Power, 2023).

The reimaginings

The recipe above has resulted in a rich broth of food studies, even as the field continues to change. As emerging scholars, we see ourselves as part of this simmering mixture, and we are indebted to the work that has come before us. Much like the organic substances of which food is made, the ingredients to address problems in food systems have long been in existence. As opposed to writing new recipes for food studies on a blank page, our reimagining involves filling the margins of existing recipes with notes, sketches, and stains. In this process, we are inspired by decolonial practices of nurturing the vitality that exists within the margins of power (Escobar, 2020). To this end, we brought the following key concepts to the CAFS 2023 plenary table to inform our discussion: *infrastructure* (Hunt), *haunting* (Speakman), *messiness* (nasser), *facilitation* (Chartrand), *reciprocity* (Hamel-Charest), and *humility* (Hassen).

Here, we add these ideas to the recipe of food studies in Canada, offering examples from our previous and ongoing research practices that gesture toward the ways in which such work might take shape. Replacing the sequence of linear "steps" above, we revise the terminology to nonlinear "rounds"—invoking both cycles of iteration as well as the musical practice of multiple voices singing staggered, repeatable melodies. We also use mathematical symbols (i.e., *x, y, z*) in place of numerical values (i.e., 1, 2, 3) to indicate space for variability and substitution.

~~Step 1~~ Round *x*: Melt a cup of transdisciplinarity + a cup of *onto-epistem-ologies*

Commenting on the 2014 CAFS plenary, which provided inspiration for our 2023 panel, Brady, Levkoe, and Szanto (2015) call on food studies to incorporate approaches that are both "interdisciplinary" and "*inter-epistemological*" (p. 7). In other words, the flavour of the food studies broth can be deepened not only by adding various ingredients (disciplines), but also by adjusting the apparatuses and processes that are used for cooking (ontologies and epistemologies). Reflective of the increasing inclusion in food studies of the embodied practices of artists, food provisioners, and natural scientists (Szanto et al., 2022), we advocate for an *onto-epistem-ological* approach (Barad, 2007, p. 185) that values material and nonhuman agency as components of research, and which recognizes the holistic and mutually constructive relationship among the processes of making knowledge (epistemology) and the outcomes of those processes (ontology) (Wilson, 2008).

Hunt and Speakman draw on theories of mediation to bring attention to the vital processes that animate the "middle spaces" of food systems. Informed by his experience in restaurant kitchens as a cook and researcher, Hunt notices how the frequently hostile social hierarchies that define these environments manifest in both the critical reviews that circulate around restaurants—such as the Michelin Guide—and the very material-sensorial *infrastructures* that constitute restaurant spaces—such as heat and cold, chemical cleaning agents, burns, and cuts (Pilcher, 2016). Conceiving of supermarkets as *haunted* spaces, Speakman observes that meat departments carefully manage the liminal forms of life that they sell (Radin & Kowal, 2017), mitigating the liveliness of their juices and flesh within plastic and styrofoam sarcophagi. She tunes into these material traces by learning from ethologists, botanists, and other practitioners who translate between human and more-than-human forms of communication (Despret, 2013; Gordon, 1997/2008; Marder, 2013).

As a collective, we suggest that the microbes in the air, chemicals in the water, and other aspects of surrounding environments contribute just as much to the broth's taste as the ingredients and implements listed in the recipe. Importantly, diverse Indigenous food scholars and practitioners have long recognized the inseparability of epistemology and ontology as well as the animacy of place (Todd, 2016). When culturally appropriate, food studies can learn from these approaches, which listen to and derive direction from the wisdom embedded in the material world (Morrison, 2011)

~~Step 2~~ Round *y*: Stir in a tablespoon of (*collaborative*) critique

Challenging the academic imperative to make unique contributions to scholarship as individuals, we are adamant that our insights are neither novel nor solely our own. We find that we cannot view food systems objectively from a detached lens because we are embedded within food networks as researchers and eaters (Haraway, 1988). The aromas of the food studies broth surround us and seep into our pores, and our perspectives emerge from these places.

nasser and Chartrand conduct research through embodied encounters with food spaces and the visceral activities therein. By meeting collaborators "where they were at" in literal and figurative senses, nasser (2022) supported the *messiness* of participant centred research in her work on the performance of diverse food cultures in Little Burgundy (a predominantly Black neighbourhood of Montréal). As opposed to following a prefabricated plan, she co-created a research process alongside racialized residents, which listened to the agency that plants expressed in garden plots of culturally and racially appropriate foods. Likewise, Chartrand considers themself to be a *facilitator* of knowledge in their academic work; she cultivates spaces for knowledge sharing, using food as a tool for lifelong learning. While exploring questions in their writing like the divisions between "urban" and "traditional" expressions of Métis identity (Coulthard, 2014), she expands on such themes by learning Indigenous culinary practices to enact extensions of harvesting practices in kitchens.

Together, we argue that we must re-envision our identities as researchers if we are to *collaborate* with diverse knowledge. In short, we support an expansion of "critical" research that decentres Western modes of critical theory even as these sources of scholarship are not displaced entirely (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). At times, this extension of the field may include reciprocal exchanges with expertise on the edges of academic traditions, like a recipe blog that incorporates user feedback; at other times, it may involve allowing these teachings to flourish outside of the academy, like a recipe collection passed through generations of people who learn modifications by cooking together.

~~Step 3~~ Round *z*: Heat to a simmering ^*mutual* transformation

When we work from the middle of the times and places in which we are situated, rather than imagining that we can critique food systems from the outside, we also surrender control over the findings and implications of our research. Just as we shape ingredients when we cook with them, ingredients *mutually* shape us when we spoon them as broth into our mouths. While food studies remains committed to building better food systems, and the urgency of this task mounts, our discussions mirror a growing embrace of uncertainty in the field. Instead of setting out a singular pathway based on a unified vision of a food system pre- and post-transformation, we see multiple versions of "better food systems" as moving targets that may not be agreed upon (Hammelman et al., 2020; Rosol et al., 2022).

Hamel-Charest and Hassen take direction on the composition of nourishing food systems from the expertise of the communities with which they interact. Hamel-Charest practiced knowledge *reciprocity* with the Anicinabe community of Lac Simon (Québec), co-creating a participatory book on the culinary heritage of the community. The process respected the community's modalities of knowledge transmission via the presentation of narrative, family memories, and an emphasis on experiences, rather than specific parameters (e.g., ingredient quantities, cooking times, etc.) (La communauté anicinabe de Lac Simon, 2023). Also favouring *humility* over rigid guidelines as an approach to understanding "healthy eating" in context, Hassen (2023) used in-depth interviews to unveil the under-acknowledged care work that teachers perform to address students' food needs in British Columbia.

In contrast to the experiences that are regrettably common in academia as an industry (especially for emerging scholars) (Burch et al., 2023), we appreciated the plenary as a space that modelled generous exchange without a sense of competition, as in the cases of a dinner party conversation or a recipe exchange. Our interactions as panelists inspired our collaboration on this article, as we wanted to continue to learn about food systems from one another. In this way, we have intended, through our work here, to enact together the durational relationships of trust that we see as foundational to reimagined food studies.

Round *xyz...*: Taste for seasoning and *adjust*

This recipe is not a finished product. As we have articulated, the task of reimagining food studies cannot be reduced to a set of prescriptive instructions. Rather than encouraging readers to follow our recipe directly, we invite you to sample, to *adjust*, to iterate, and to improve. Your improvisations might take form as a research or methods article, a video post to a CAFS social media page, a panel discussion at a future food studies conference, or they may spill into other media that express experiences beyond words (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 1: Graphic interpretation of our reimagined recipe (by Raihan Hassen)

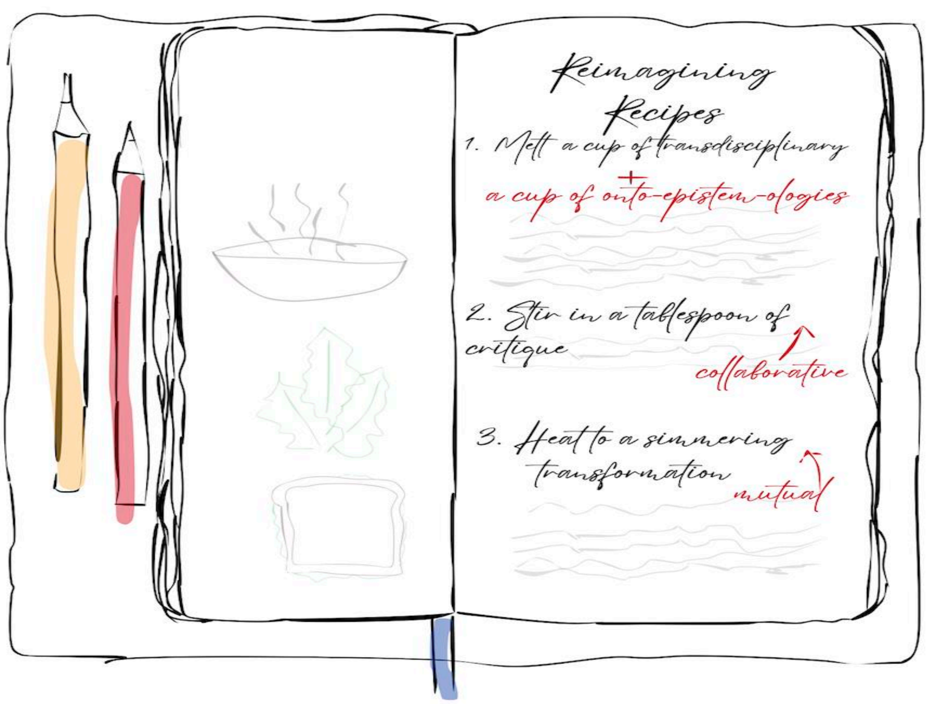
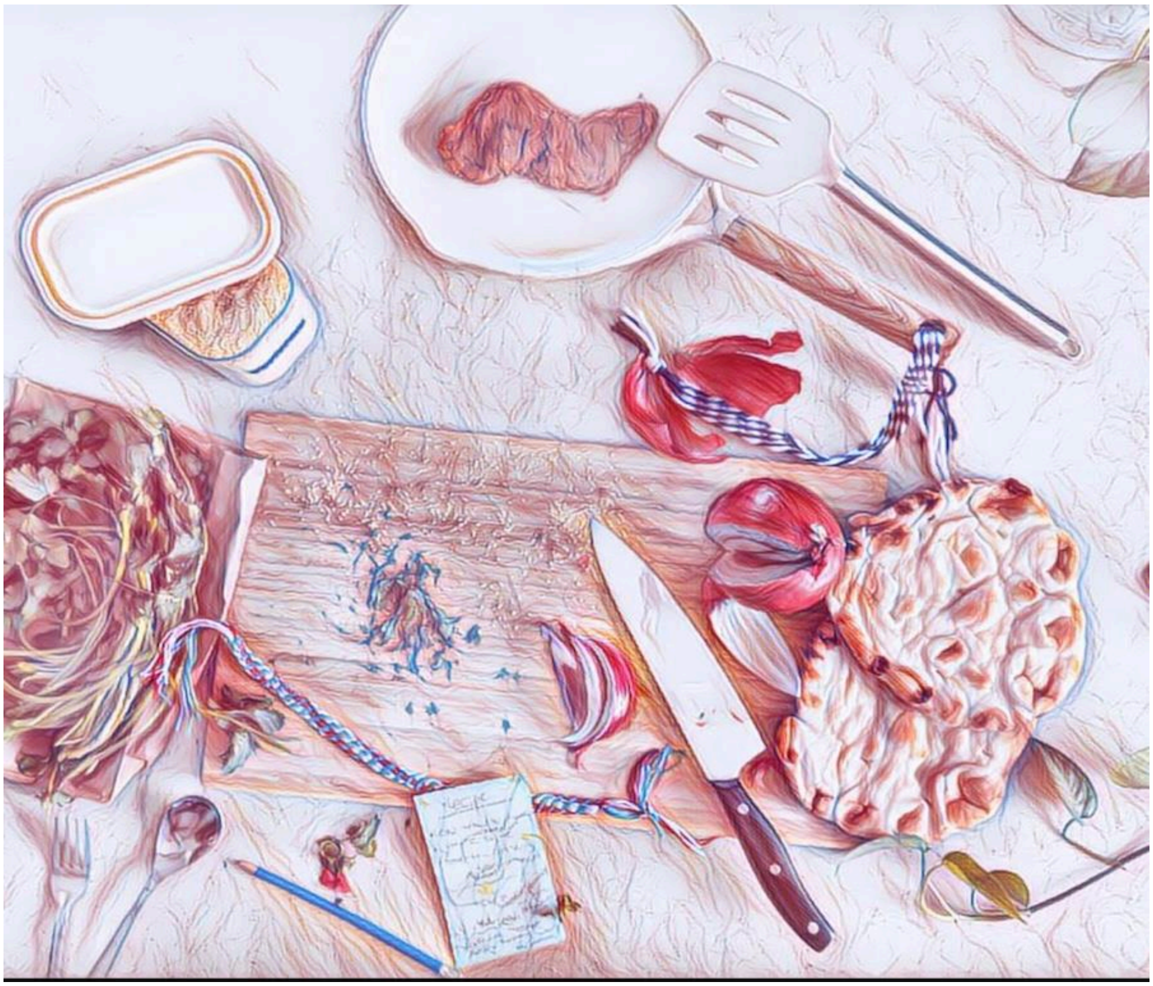


Figure 2: Photographic interpretation of our reimagined recipe (by Stephanie Chartrand)



Conclusion

Currently, the institutional contexts in which food studies are situated pose challenges to the reimaginings we have presented in this article. Like restaurant critics who assess the dishes set on the table in front of them, the reviewers and hiring committees of the academic world are often encouraged to limit their evaluations to final products. The success of academic fields therefore tends to focus on measures of growing research *outputs*, including large numbers of dedicated journals, high student enrolment in academic departments, and increased funding for new scholarly positions (Berg & Seeber, 2016). We have recommended instead that the quality of food studies in Canada should be considered in relation to improving elements of research *practice*. We therefore call for further efforts to increase the accessibility of knowledge mobilization initiatives (Knezevic et al., 2023), to activate greater student engagement in campus food systems (Classens et al., 2023), and to provide support for partnerships with groups outside of academia—particularly with communities affected disproportionately by the ongoing oppressions of ableism, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy (Kepkiewicz et al., 2023). We believe that, when enacted to address either polycrises or their more granular challenges, such approaches to food studies may offer their practitioners and their beneficiaries increased equity in both process and product.

In its attention to process and product, our recipe for reimagined food studies is akin to folkloric recipes for "stone soup" (Brown, 1947). In the tale's various versions, a group of residents are initially unwilling to share food with a collection of visitors passing through their town. As the visitors place a purportedly magic stone inside a pot of water and begin to heat the concoction, however, the residents gradually contribute supplemental ingredients until a delicious result is achieved—one that is then shared with everyone. Community groups and scholars have used the story as an analogy for the relational principles of community organizing, wherein individuals support each other by offering available materials and skills to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Barnett, 2022; Stone Soup Network, n.d.).

To enrich the broth of food studies in Canada, we call on you, our neighbours in and beyond the CAFS network to consider nourishing elements that you might be able to contribute. Do you, for instance, have access to pantries and cellars (e.g., institutional funding), meals-on-wheels vehicles (e.g., communication platforms), and/or inventory tools, cleaning supplies, and kitchen playlists (e.g., administrative/affective labour)? Whether you are working with gallons or litres, pinches or drams, we urge you to share the tools at your disposal to welcome diverse visitors and to create a more open, collective kitchen. Just as this article was inspired by a sort of recipe-exchange plenary session at a food studies conference, so might future iterations be engendered in kitchens, auditoriums, fields, or classrooms. Together, we hope that we can reimagine food studies in Canada as a space where many cooks *don't* spoil the broth.

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Raihan Hassen is a dietitian of primarily Ethiopian ancestry born and raised on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, colonially known as Vancouver, British Columbia. Raihan has experience working in food security, public health, and research focussed on food access and school food programs in BC.

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Narrative

Un-learning and re-learning: Reflections on relationality, urban berry foraging, and settler research uncertainties

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Abstract

In this reflexive piece, the authors consider the unexpected lessons learned while undertaking a collaborative research project with their home institution's Indigenous Learning Centre on urban berry foraging. The faculty member questions the ethics of settlers undertaking this work, even if in collaboration with an Indigenous community, alongside the promises of this work to critical food studies. The practice of urban foraging is understood as a wider metaphor for Indigenous worldview, and for different ways of being and relating. The student's reflections weave together themes of learning outside the classroom, with family and community, and the holistic aspects of doing research.

Keywords: Urban agriculture; land-based learning; settler and Indigenous relations

Résumé

Dans cet article réflexif, les auteures examinent les leçons inattendues apprises en entreprenant un projet de recherche en collaboration avec le Centre d'apprentissage autochtone de leur institution sur la cueillette de fruits en milieu urbain. La professeure s'interroge sur les enjeux éthiques liés au fait que ce soit des personnes issues de la colonisation qui entreprennent ce travail, même si c'est en collaboration avec une communauté autochtone, ainsi que sur les promesses de ce travail pour les études critiques sur l'alimentation. La pratique de la cueillette urbaine est comprise comme une métaphore plus large de la vision

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autochtone du monde et des différentes façons d'être et d'établir des relations. Les réflexions de l'étudiante entremêlent les thèmes de l'apprentissage en dehors de la salle de classe, avec la famille et la communauté, et les aspects holistiques de la recherche.

Introduction

In an era of truth and reconciliation, settlers have been called on to engage in processes of decolonization and anti-colonization[1] and to denounce colonial knowledge systems that continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, including in university spaces. As a queer-identified, white, settler academic living and working in Treaty 6 territory, I take seriously the responsibilities to learn Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, languages, and teachings. My learning and un-learning journeys over the last fifteen-plus years have included recognizing my own positionality as complicit with dominant systems of power; attending and supporting political rallies and protests that call out ongoing colonial violences; attending Indigenous talks, workshops, and ceremonies; working alongside Indigenous students and communities; reading and assigning Indigenous authors and academics in the courses I teach; and acknowledging the sordid history that western academia has with Indigenous peoples and their knowledges. These learnings and un-learnings have been iterative, not linear, and variably difficult, humbling, connecting, and powerful. It wasn't until this project, however, that I learned these lessons more deeply. In the text that follows, an upper-year undergraduate student, Ronak Rai, and I explore the lessons of relationality and traditional teachings learned while undertaking a research project on urban berry foraging; the ethics and uncertainties of non-Indigenous settlers undertaking this work; and the promises of this work for all treaty people.[2] Our hope is that this reflexive piece will support others grappling with the weighty, complex, and pressing questions of how, if, when, where, and with whom to undertake anti-colonial research in the academy and from within food studies.

Faculty intro: As a critical food studies scholar interested in de-centring western, nutri-centric frameworks of healthy eating, I was initially drawn to Indigenous understandings of food while working on a book that sought to complicate singular food truths common to western food discourses (Overend, 2021). Food from within a dominant western paradigm is often overly and overtly nutrient- and calorically oriented, but from within Indigenous worldviews, food is holistically and deeply tied to land, ancestors, community, spirit, and non-human animals (Kimmerer, 2013; LaDuke, 2012; Martin & Mathews, 2021). In my own thinking, I saw many of these interdependent, collective, and holistic teachings as welcome, necessary antidotes to the ever-creeping logics of neoliberal capitalism that demand disconnections from the land, from history, from

[1] For Carlson (2016), terms like postcolonialism and decolonization facilitate the framing of colonialism as being something of the past, whereas anti-colonialism, in contrast, is "rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, interpreting the experiences of colonized peoples on their own terms, and evoking intellectual understandings not forced through Eurocentric lenses" (p. 5).
[2] One of the lessons I have learned from Elders and Indigenous teachings is that we are all treaty people, we are all connected to the land, and to each other. As such, the health of the land and food insecurity affect us all, though due to the ongoing effects of colonization, Indigenous peoples are often affected more acutely.

knowledge, and from one another, which, I think, is what ultimately led me to this project. Compelled to learn more about food from Indigenous worldviews and motivated by the social and political possibilities of these teachings, I reached out to the Director at my home institution's Indigenous Learning Centre about collaborating on a research project.[3] In our initial conversation, we talked about Indigenous food insecurity and food sovereignty efforts, urban food solutions (especially amidst the food shortages and food inflation seen during the COVID-19 pandemic), and the need for a deepening of land-based food knowledge in cities for Indigenous and settler groups alike. With her guidance, we eventually landed on the importance of berries and their place in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, the Cree name for Beaver Hills House, colonially known as Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Student intro: My name is Ronak Rai and I was born in Kashmir, India. I immigrated to Canada with my parents and older brother in 2000. My family's decision to leave Kashmir was driven by the desire to provide my brother and I opportunities outside the impacts of occupation and neo-colonialism. Although I was too young at the time to recall the day-to-day challenges of living in the aftermath of British colonialism and Indian imperialism in Kashmir, my undergraduate education and my participation in this research has deepened the social, historical, and political contexts of those experiences. I gained a better intellectual understanding of the similar and divergent histories I share with Indigenous peoples in Canada. As a settler in this country, I also acquired a stronger political determination to use my education to bolster Indigenous sovereignty efforts. Having taken two prior courses with Dr. Overend, I initially reached out in the hope of undertaking an independent study broadly related to food and health. It was then that I learned about the urban foraging project and its ties to Indigenous knowledge systems. I didn't know exactly what the project would entail or what I'd learn in the process. As a psychology honours student with a minor in sociology, I had solid research experience at the undergraduate level. While these research experiences afforded me valuable (conventional) academic knowledge and skills, my participation in the urban foraging project was impactful in ways I didn't anticipate. It opened the ability to connect with the research process in personal and politicized ways, which I hadn't yet experienced.

Eventually, and with the guidance of our Indigenous Learning Centre's knowledge keeper, we applied for and were awarded a small grant to look at berry foraging in our city's extensive river valley, which grows a range of edible berries, nuts, and roots. The grant money was used to: 1) organize a sweat ceremony with a local Elder to honour the project, and receive guidance about berries; 2) interview four to five local Elders and knowledge keepers about their stories and teachings on berries; 3) photograph and map berry sources in the city's river valley system; and 4) organize two community events on urban berry foraging. The aim was to pair the "what" and "where" of berries in our city with traditional Cree and other local Indigenous teachings, in part to encourage reflection of the edible food sources in urban environments and in part to centralize the more holistic and relational aspects of food, common to Indigenous worldviews.

[3] The Director was also invited to contribute to this write-up, but due to workload demands on her end was not able to participate—a reminder of the often-taxing demands placed on Indigenous colleagues' time and expertise. The Director did indicate her enthusiasm and support for the piece and her contributions to the project are noted throughout.

Settler research uncertainties

As a settler doing this work, I felt honoured to be part of it and excited about the possibilities of the research, but I also felt uncertain about my own place within the work. Was this my work to do? Would I inadvertently carry western settler logics and norms into the work? Was I doing this for my own gain, or for something broader? Would I do justice to the knowledge that felt both ancient and sacred? I didn't initially voice these concerns for reasons I am not entirely sure about. Perhaps if I voiced them, they would become real? Perhaps they would fade as the research progressed? Perhaps I had internalized western, colonial, masculinist norms that dictated that I had to uphold a kind of mastery and authority about my role in the project? Regardless of why these uncertainties emerged, and/or why they initially went unaddressed, I came to realize that these questions were in fact central to the research project. Much like a shadow syllabus—a helpful and enduring concept coined by Sonya Huber (2014) to articulate the unspoken, just-below-the-surface contexts of classroom learning—I was learning to listen and respect the deeper research questions emerging.

Despite extensive literature reviews, good intentions, carefully mapped research designs, research ethics board[4] approvals, and well-thought-out interview questions, my uncertainties were *rightly* asking me to deeply reflect on the project and my place as a settler within it. Western academic has a long, nefarious history "in which research has perpetuated and been complicit in violence against Indigenous groups" (Lira et al., 2019, pp. 475-476). It has done so through othering and stealing the knowledges of Indigenous peoples, often for the gain and benefit of non-Indigenous peoples and groups. In their work on refusing dominant, colonial power relations in research methodologies, Tuck and Yang (2014) importantly ask: "how do we learn from and respect the wisdom [of the research] stories we hear while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze" (p. 2)? This is a key question for anyone aiming to unsettle and undo colonial (and other dominant) power relations in their work and one we took seriously in this write-up.

To disrupt and work against colonial research dynamics, Tuck and Yang (2014) rely on three axioms. The first is to ensure that the subaltern is not speaking about their pain or trauma, which positions the marginalized or oppressed person/group as powerless to make their own change, while rendering the researcher (even if unintentional) as both saviour and change-maker. The second is to honour that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve—knowledge that is better shared in community and through ceremony. And the third axiom is to question whether research is the best invention over other forms of problem solving and knowledge dissemination. These axioms will be discussed in relation to urban berry foraging, alongside wider Indigenous frameworks of relationality. Relationality is a concept, practice, and way of being that maintains deep, reciprocal relationships to place and to each other (Smith, 2021). Relationality connects people, stories, and ideas to the land, to kin, to ancestors, and to community, and it is a slow, embodied form of learning (Tynan, 2021). While

[4]4 While university research ethics boards have attempted to support Indigenous protocols and ways of knowing in applications that work with or alongside Indigenous populations, ultimately these considerations on their own are insufficient. As this piece explores, settlers researching with Indigenous populations need to reflect far beyond any kind of rote checklist when undertaking this work.

I have been exposed to the concept of relationality multiple times prior, it wasn't until we embarked on this research journey that the deeper teachings of relationality became learned.

Learning and un-learning about berries

With the start of spring, our project was also under way. It began with an independent study course I ran with Ronak where we studied Indigenous food insecurity and sovereignty efforts as well as the importance and role of berries to various local Indigenous communities. The course readings were Indigenous-centred and did not focus on stories of pain, but instead on deep knowledge of food and food sources. In early May of 2022, the Director of our campus's Indigenous Learning Centre organized a sweat ceremony with a local Elder to bless our project and receive guidance on berries and their roles in medicine and in ceremony. Later in May, I was invited to attend a Cree culture camp. I was emailed a schedule and told it would be a good place to make connections for possible interviews. Without knowing otherwise, I attended the culture camp much like I would an academic conference. I showed up with a notebook, a pen, and a printout of the schedule. But, upon arrival, the traditional grounds where the camp was held felt nothing like an academic conference. The teachings all took place in teepee sharing circles and/or on the land/in the bush. I also came to realize that despite the intended schedule, the order of programming had a different pace and logic. Talks, activities, and events began when the speaker or facilitator arrived and ended when the conversation had run its course. Naïvely, I had booked other meetings and commitments in the city that I was trying to balance with the culture camp, without realizing that a big part of the learning of the camp was the immersive experience of it all—being on the land, in community, and in conversation, without external time constraints. It was the relational aspects of the camp that were the foundations of learning, not necessarily the content of each activity. It took me a while to understand this teaching.

Image 1: Deer hide rattle (author's image)

After the four-day camp, I found myself focussing on the lack of interview participants we had lined up, rather than what felt at the time like "secondary" teachings, including making a deer hide rattle (photo above), attending sharing circles, and participating in a guided nature walk. While each of these experiences were thought provoking, informative, and humbling in ways I couldn't yet quite articulate, I didn't initially understand their connection to berry foraging until much later in the year. At the time, I was overly focussed on the tangible outcomes of the research and anxious that we hadn't made any formal connections on the interview portion of it. We only had the summer months to try and collect a handful of interviews and we were already one month in without any. I felt responsible to the Indigenous Learning Centre I was working with, the student I had brought on board, and the funding group to keep this project on track. After the camp, I doubled down my efforts to try and recruit participants. I reached out to people I had been introduced to by the knowledge keeper and names I'd been given from the Indigenous Learning Centre. Despite my efforts, I found that prospective interviewees either weren't available or weren't responsive. At the time, I wasn't sure if their lack of availability and responsiveness had to do with the broader social and political commitments of Indigenous peoples, especially throughout the summer months, or with my role as a settler doing this work. June is National Indigenous History Month, culminating with summer solstice celebrations. July was centered around the emotionally laden and politically charged visit from Pope Francis to Alberta to apologize for the atrocities and legacies of the residential School system.

Additionally, the summer we were running the project coincided with the first summer of official (even if pre-emptive) reopening after the previous two lockdown summers and many of the people we were hoping to interview were on the land and back in community. Come August and September, planning was underway for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. After two funding extensions and a continued dearth of interview participants my initial doubts about my place in the project were growing. Was I participating in insidious forms of Indigenous extractivism (Shotwell, 2022)? Was my role as an academic and my embeddedness in an academic institution and research funding infrastructures impeding the process? Perhaps some (or many) of the traditional teachings on berries were lost or forgotten? Or maybe they were being shared in Indigenous-only spaces and places? I wrestled with these types of questions throughout the next phases of the project, without any definitive answers. I thought about reaching out for guidance, but Terri was on an administrative leave and Cynthia, the knowledge keeper we were working with, was travelling. While my doubts about my place as a settler academic on the one hand were growing, I was buoyed, even guided by the promises of this work and the lessons therein on the other hand, and increasingly unsure how, or even if it was possible, to reconcile these conflicting aspects of the work.

The initial impetus that there were worthwhile lessons in this project I do not believe was misguided. But, as per Tuck and Yang's (2014) second decolonizing axiom, I was reminded that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve. In contrast to uncertainties posed by the formal research aspects of the project, the two community urban foraging events we organized felt notably different. The knowledge keeper, student, and I, along with other local berry foragers put on two free community events—one at an inner-city, arts-based, grassroots, Indigenous-focussed venue and the other at an environmental education community centre that forefronts local Indigenous teachings and initiatives. In exchange for tobacco and broad cloth, the knowledge keeper opened both events with drumming, song, and prayer and offered traditional teachings about berries. She also shared with great pride a new song her daughters had made about berries for our project. At each event, we offered attendees foraged saskatoon berries, goji berries,[5] raspberry leaf tea, as we discussed our various projects and interests. The energy at these events was palpable and brimming with excitement, curiosity, mutual respect, and care—for berries, foraging, and one another. For me, these events were also transformative in my own thinking about the project. With only one research interview to share, my own experiences of berry picking, and the lessons of relationality therein, came into greater focus.

It was through these reflections I realized that I had gotten at least one part of the initial research design quite wrong: the berries weren't our objects of study, they were our teachers. From within western ontologies, berries are inanimate objects, studied from scientific and anthropocentric knowledge frames. From within Indigenous worldview, berries are both animate and kin. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), who describes herself as a mother, scientist, professor, and member of the Potawatomi Nation, reflects on her experiences "from a childhood in the woods to the university" (p. 41) and the shifting worldviews therein. She notes that "the questions scientists raised [about plants] were not 'Who are you?' but 'What is it?' No one asked plants 'what can you tell us?'…The botany I was taught was reductionistic, mechanistic, and strictly objective. Plants were reduced to objects; they were not subjects" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 42). Having been raised in a western school system and without knowing otherwise, I too inadvertently held the same western beliefs about plants. Slowly, through the Indigenous teachings I was being exposed to, and through the relational and reciprocal practices of foraging, my thinking about (or rather with?) berries changed. I wasn't in fact studying berries. I was learning about relational ways of being through the teachings of berries.

By mid-summer, as the saskatoon berries were ripening from a bluey-purple to a blue-black, I ventured into the river valley with the photographer and digital mapper. As a newbie forager, I wasn't sure what to expect. Would I find (or be shown) any berries? Would they be ready to harvest? Would I be able to properly identify them? Would I offer protocol in the correct way? Despite these questions, and the time needed to drive, then hike, to the areas where the berries grew, and the time and care needed to pick and forage, I found the overall experience to be quite joyful and fulfilling. Following the guidance I'd received from the knowledge keeper we were working with, as well as other local Cree teachings on foraging, I offered protocol to the land; asked the berries if they wished to be picked and "listened" for the answer; took no more than what I needed; shared the harvest with Elders and other community members; and left some for others, including the winged and rooted ones, which perpetuated the cycle of reciprocity. Relationality and plant sentience are recurring themes in Cree ontologies and epistemologies of berries. As Cree scholar Janelle Marie Baker (2021) notes, "berry plants decide whether or not to produce fruit, and whether or not an individual will encounter…them in the forest" (p. 281).

Baker also explains that entire berry patches will relocate if they are not properly cared for, a reminder of

[5] Yong Fei Guan (2023) researches heritage goji berry plants and their cultural Chinese history in Edmonton.

our responsibilities to the land and everything around us. That berries are agentic and relational is a profound antidote to the western object-centred discourses of food.

Image 2: Alissa in forest

Image 3: Alissa foraging

Image 4: Saskatoon berries on bush

During the two-to-three-hour foraging outings, I felt a genuine sense of presence and humility to place and to the land. Herman Michell (2009), a Professor of Education who is of Woodland Cree heritage, writes that berry picking is more than just sustenance, it is a way of life: “I was a part of the land, and the land was a part of me” (as cited in in Baker, 2021, p. 283). Similarly, Poe et al. (2014) describe a deep sense of connection, or what they call “the relational ecologies of belonging” when urban foraging (p. 901). I too felt a deep sense of connection upon being shown and being invited to pick saskatoon berries in a city I'd lived for nearly twenty years and on trails I'd walked and biked many times before. While the berries had always been in the city, it was my thinking, seeing, and listening that had shifted. The sense of relation to the more-than-human geographies that surrounded me was a welcome change from the transactional exchanges of western, globalized, colonial, and capitalist food systems. Our foraging outings never yielded large quantities of berries, but the modest hauls felt precious, even sacred, because of the care that went into getting them but also because of my changed thinking about them. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes that strawberries are "gifts from the earth [that] establish a relationship to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. A gift creates an ongoing relationship" (p. 27). I felt connected to the land and to the people around me differently and more profoundly than I had experienced prior. It was here that I realized that the rattle-making, teepee teachings, and nature walks of the culture camp were foundational to berry foraging because they centralized everything around us and our relation to it. I was also coming to realize that the knowledge I initially set out to look for in the study was much different than anticipated. The teachings were not out in the world waiting to be discovered, but rather a learning journey within my own thinking and doing. The knowledge I was initially searching for was far less visible than the traditional, western (tangible) markers of research success. In short, I had to embody the teachings, not just study them—a lesson that Karen Pheasant-Neganigwane helped me realize through her teachings in the one interview we were able to conduct.

Image 5: Karen sharing knowledge

Image 6: Strawberry quillwork

Karen Pheasant-Neganigwane is a Nishanaabeg educator, author, dancer, and quill worker who grew up on the land of the Manitoulin in Ontario, but who has lived and worked in Amiskwacîwâskahikan since the 1980s. For Pheasant-Neganigwane, the land is essential to learning. She notes, "as a professor, an educator, and a teacher, I tell my students their greatest education is to be on the land, to camp, to look around, to find out what's in it." Having just returned from a trip home, she spoke about her fondest childhood memories of strawberry (Ode'min, meaning heart-berry) picking with her family and community, and noting that these were community, month-long undertakings, usually in June. Importantly for Pheasant-Neganigwane, "berry picking is not individualistic. It's a family, a collective, and a communal undertaking." She recalls month-long campouts during strawberry season where there would be song, ceremony, and intergenerational teachings. Much like the immersive lessons of the Cree culture camp, where learning took place *with* the land, she notes that "you can't harvest without being on the land…sleeping on the ground, breathing in that morning dew." In reminiscing about these childhood experiences, she wondered if the Euro-western concept of a "picnic" (eating outside with loved ones) stemmed from Indigenous berry *pic*king and foraging practices. In addition to memories and practices of berry picking, she shared quill work she'd done featuring strawberries and talked about traditional dyes from the berries that were used to colour baskets, jewelry, and other items. Her teachings wove together the relational and reciprocal aspects of foraging. Jokingly, yet poignantly, Pheasant-Neganigwane notes that "Dairy Queen teaches us that strawberries are just a topping on an ice cream cone, [but] they are so much more than that. Berries are a sacred food." In reflecting on the importance of these teachings, she emphasizes, "we always value the seen, but we need to value the unseen. When I say I lived my life, the essence of it, and I never forget the unseen. It's included everything."

We closed the project in and around winter solstice, about ten months from when we began. The funders had a hard deadline of the end of the (western) calendar year and despite continued attempts, we still couldn't recruit any additional interviewees. I had come to a place in my own thinking that the project (in its current iteration) had run its course. The community events had sparked enthusiasm and good, thoughtful, and careful conversations about Indigenous teachings and urban foraging. Ronak and I had gained some hard-earned lessons in Indigenous worldview and relational research practices. I had also accepted that we weren't going to complete the interview portion of the research. I had ongoing frustrations about doing this type of work amidst fixed timelines and wondered if our project would have had different outcomes if there were more fluid (or no) timelines for the slowness of the work to unfold and more time to develop deeper connections in and with community. Much like the unexpected joys of being shown forgeable food in nature, or the gift of traditional teachings from an Elder or knowledge keeper, these teachings were inherently unpredictable (as the culture camp had taught me) and necessarily slow (as berry foraging had taught me). And while I had unresolved ambiguities about settlers doing this work (even if collaborative), I held on to the transformational potential of this work for critical food studies and for students.

Image 7: Saskatoon berry close-up

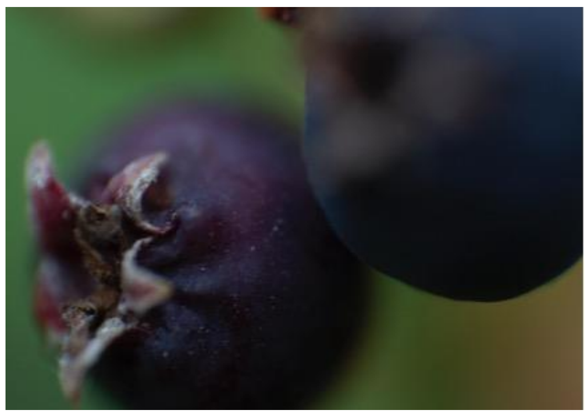

Image 8: Map of river valley with berry locations

Student reflections

From the sweat lodge ceremony to berry picking in the river valley, to the more personalized academic texts I was reading, the project taught me that there are different ways to learn about and make sense of the world. When I was completing a literature review on Indigenous food insecurity and Indigenous Food Sovereignty, I was surprised to see the widespread use of personal photos, stories, and histories in the scholarly work of the Indigenous authors and academics I was studying. Reading such accounts contradicted what I had been taught in a Western academic setting and in most of my undergraduate studies—that research was to be conveyed as "objectively" as possible. In much of what I read in my undergraduate education, there seemed to be little to no space for personal interpretation or experience. However, while reading the work of Indigenous academics and authors for the urban foraging project, I noticed a sense of connection, relationality, and vulnerability that I hadn't read in academic work prior. The personal expressions of thoughts, experiences, and observations were incredibly engaging, especially in comparison to the more distanced and formal academic writing I was used to.

Image 9: Community learning in river valley

Image 10: Cynthia singing with drum

The other significant difference I noticed in this independent study compared to my other undergraduate courses was the space and place of learning. Rather than being in a classroom, this project allowed me to learn in relation to the community and to the land. By participating in Indigenous ceremony, berry picking, and community events, my family, friends, community, and learning were intertwined, and not separate from one another. These community-based learning experiences were both grounding and eye-opening in ways I hadn't expected. The exposure to Indigenous worldviews and concepts, including reciprocity, environmental stewardship, collaboration, and connection with the land and one another, reconnected me with core Indian or collectivist values I had strayed from. These relational learning experiences helped reconcile parts of myself that were lost in trying to understand where to go and what to do with my life (quintessential questions for a student graduating from university). Ultimately, they guided me towards the anti-colonial counselling work I plan to pursue post-graduation.

It was the culmination of my own experiences as an immigrant settler, combined with the deep, relational learning acquired from the berry foraging project that led to my growing interests in Indigenous history in Canada, Indigenous worldviews, and contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous peoples. These interests will play a pivotal role in my upcoming master's program in Counselling Psychology. My hope is to meaningfully contribute to Indigenous-led initiatives that aim to decolonize the field of psychology to better serve Indigenous clients seeking mental health care. More specifically, I plan to explore ways in which counselling can centre trauma- and culturally informed practices. Such practices legitimize Indigenous knowledge systems of health and healing instead of acting as a form of continued oppression and colonization through adherence to western ideologies (Fellner et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2017).

As a person of colour, the academic work I do is not separate from my lived experiences, but rather informed by them. Continuing to learn about my own nation's history of colonialism and occupation allows me to observe important intersections between my own community and that of the ongoing colonial systems still negatively impacting Indigenous peoples in Canada today. As a non-Indigenous settler, I recognize that at a personal and professional level, my work carries significant responsibilities. Foremost among these is an acknowledgement of my privilege in benefiting from the current Canadian system (e.g., a safe upbringing, education, and other services and support) at the expense of Indigenous sovereignty through colonization. Another critical responsibility is engaging in continuous education about the ongoing impacts of colonialism. This means understanding the historical context of the land where I reside, and learning what it truly means to be trauma- and culturally informed in the context of Indigenous experiences. This extends to my responsibility to ensure active collaboration and ensuring that my work is centred on being informed by Indigenous voices, including planning, and participating in community-based research, and utilizing anti-colonial research methodologies.

While my pathway to Indigenous worldviews came through urban foraging and food studies, the lessons learned on land- and community-based teachings will follow me into the next phases of my learning journeys. I came into the berries project with the initial goal of broadening my research scope and I could not have anticipated the profound impact it would have. This journey, while rooted in academia, has significantly shaped my worldviews, my place in those worldviews, and my professional aspirations as a result. I have developed a deeper connection to the work and find myself professionally and politically committed to working against the ongoing violences perpetuated on Indigenous clients through mainstream counselling practices that centre western ways of knowing and doing. At this point, I don't know what I will learn in the next few years of my program, but I aim to utilize my learning, teachings, skills, privileges, and relative power to contribute relationally and anti-colonially to long-term changes that prioritize Indigenous healing and healing methods, including those, like berry foraging, that connect to the land and to community.

Image 11: Group shot at community event

Image 12: Ronak presenting

Ongoing relationalities

As universities (and the people in them) grapple (often clumsily, even if in earnest) with de- and anti-colonial efforts, we must be careful to work against what Dennis Foley (2018) aptly characterizes as the McDonaldization of Indigenous methodologies in the academy. Universities have long and enduring histories of Indigenous extractivism, where deep, holistic, and complex concepts and practices are standardized, oversimplified, and made to "fit" within settler-colonial and capitalist paradigms or are used for academic gain without attention to mutuality. Leanne Betasmosake Simpson (2013), a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist, emphasizes that the alternative to colonial extractivism "is deep reciprocity. It's respect, its relationship, its responsibility, and it's local" (as cited in Tynan, 2021, p. 604). Amidst the growing privatization and neoliberalization of postsecondary institutions (and food cultures), the lessons of relationality learned through foraging and Indigenous worldview are necessary antidotes to the speed, efficiency, individualism, and economic gains that are typically centralized over slow, thoughtful, communal, and relational values of research (and food procurement).

The lessons of relationality learned through urban foraging have asked the student and me to embody reciprocity by considering our place in the settler systems and structures that surround us, our connectedness to the earth and to the land on which we live, and the responsibilities we bear to our human and more-than-human communities. These teachings have asked us to reflect how—and to what depths and ends—we carry and embody these lessons. For the student, this entails graduate work that deepens her understanding and practice of anti-colonial research methodologies that work with and centre Indigenous voices, experiences, and worldviews. For me, this entails a continued attunement the less visible, just-below-the-surface aspects of research and teaching; ongoing collaborations with the Indigenous Learning Centre, including the possible creation a digital story about berries and urban foraging in our city; alongside a continued commitment to work against the colonial systems and structures that endure, in ourselves and in the world.

Universities and academic disciplines, including critical food studies, have much work to do to undo the settler-colonial practices, methodologies, ontologies, and epistemologies that are foundational to western academia. For those of us in universities, we are likely quite far from research that exists without financial imperatives, strict deadlines, or quantified metrics, but that doesn't mean there aren't also lessons and joys to be gained in trying and/or creative solutions to be exercised in maneuvering some of the institutional limits placed upon us. Perhaps this is exactly the type of de- and anti-colonial work we are being called to do? While I agree with Tuck and Yang's (2014) assertion that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve, I also want to imagine, work towards, and participate in a version of the academy that does. Following Elizabeth Carlson's (2016) speculation, I want to "imagine how much academia itself might change, as well as the experiences of Indigenous scholars within it, if large numbers of settler scholars were to re-orient in these [anti-colonial] ways" (p. 17)? And for the critical food studies scholars, I want to ask in earnest and amidst the growing perils of a globalized food system, "how in our modern world can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift, [and] to make our relations with the world [and food] sacred again" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 31)? The lessons of mindfulness, care, kinship, gratitude, humility, and being in relation learned from berries but applicable far beyond them, are very much all our collective work to do.

Questions for takeaway reflection

To work against the colonial, extractivist norms so deeply imbued in western academia, the Director of the Indigenous Learning Centre we worked with suggested we offer a handful of reflexive questions for settlers undertaking this type of work. These questions are not intended as a simple checklist or a how-to map or manual for decolonizing research. Instead, they offer entry points for your own journeys of un-learning and re-learning. May they surprise and guide you.

1. How does your methodology and/or research seek to equalize (dominant) power relations within food studies, embrace humility, attend to a subjectivity and emotion, promote the participation of self-determination of participants and communities in food procurement, engage accountable food relationships, share control and ownership, and collaboratively contribute to food security and sovereignty efforts (adapted from Carlson, 2016)?

2. How might learning about food and foraging be different on the land and in community as opposed to in a classroom? What is gained when we move the place of learning outside the academy? What, if anything, is lost?

3. When is the best time to reflect on your place as a settler academic doing critical food studies work? What might be gained by doing these reflections prior to the official start of the research process (adapted from Lira et al., 2019)?

4. Does academia deserve Indigenous stories and teachings about food? In what contexts would they deserve them and in what contexts would they not (adapted from Tuck & Yang, 2014)?

5. Is research the best intervention for the food problem or issue being studied? What other forms of knowledge generation and/or dissemination might be effective or useful and why (adapted from Tuck & Yang, 2014)?

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Ronak Rai is a settler born in Kashmir, India, who immigrated to Canada in 2000. My experience as a first-generation migrant woman, coupled with learning about India and Canada's history of colonization, have strongly shaped my research interests. Currently, I am undertaking the Counselling Psychology thesis-based master's Program at the University of Alberta, where I am researching limitations and barriers for First-generation Canadian Immigrant therapists in their provision of mental healthcare services to Indigenous clients. My overarching aim is to utilize my privileges, such as education and training, to provide meaningful support to marginalized communities.

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Review Article

From greedy grocers to carbon taxes and everything in between: What do we think we know about food prices in Canada and how strong is the evidence?

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Abstract

In Canada, the task of explaining food prices falls to a handful of grey literature reports that shape media coverage and public understanding and carry significant political and policy influence. We performed an in-depth analysis of fifty-one of these influential reports, including thirty-nine reports by Statistics Canada (including Consumer Price Index reports and other studies) and twelve reports from the Canada Food Price Report (CFPR) series. Our goal was twofold: 1) to identify and classify the various explanations given for food price changes, and 2) to evaluate the scientific rigor of these explanations. We identified 232 total explanations for food price changes, spread across seven thematic categories and thirty-two sub-categories. We find that most claims made in these reports are scientifically incomplete (only 28.6% of all claims meet established criteria for the completeness of scientific arguments). We also identify a lack of comprehensiveness in the areas of emphasis and the claims being presented and drivers being explored, particularly with respect to issues presently at the centre of food price discourse in Canada, such as the agency of grocers and other supply chain actors, corporate growth imperatives, and climate change. Considering the importance of food prices and food security to prosperity and well-being in Canada, we conclude with a series of recommendations for

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strengthening the scientific rigor of these reports, including greater inclusion of supporting evidence, opportunities for peer review, and increased transparency regarding conflicts of interest and funding sources.

Keywords: Agri-food policy; food prices; price of food; food affordability; scientific rigour; inflation; pandemic; greedflation; carbon tax

Résumé

Au Canada, la tâche d'expliquer les prix des aliments incombe à une poignée de rapports de littérature grise. Ceux-ci façonnent la couverture médiatique et la compréhension du public, et exercent une influence politique et stratégique considérable. Nous avons réalisé une analyse approfondie de 51 de ces rapports importants, dont 39 de Statistique Canada (y compris des rapports sur l'indice des prix à la consommation et d'autres études) et 12 de la série de rapports sur les prix alimentaires au Canada. Notre objectif était double : 1) identifier et classer les diverses explications données aux variations des prix des aliments et 2) évaluer la rigueur scientifique de ces explications. Nous avons relevé 232 explications, réparties en 7 catégories thématiques et en 32 sous-catégories. Nous constatons que la plupart des affirmations contenues dans ces rapports sont scientifiquement incomplètes (seulement 28,6 % d'entre elles répondent aux critères établis quant à l'exhaustivité des arguments scientifiques). Nous notons aussi des lacunes quant aux domaines ciblés, aux affirmations présentées et aux facteurs explorés, en particulier en ce qui concerne les questions actuellement au cœur du discours sur les prix des aliments au Canada, telles que le rôle des épiciers et d'autres acteurs de la chaîne d'approvisionnement, les impératifs de croissance des entreprises et les changements climatiques. Compte tenu de l'importance des prix des aliments et de la sécurité alimentaire pour la prospérité et le bien-être au Canada, nous concluons par un ensemble de recommandations visant à renforcer la rigueur scientifique de ces rapports, notamment l'intégration de plus de preuves à l'appui, la possibilité d'examen par les pairs et l'amélioration de la transparence concernant les conflits d'intérêts et les sources de financement.

Introduction

In this paper, we review and evaluate the current evidence base regarding the drivers of food prices in Canada. Food prices and inflation in general are currently high-profile topics in Canada and around the world; recently, the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found that large grocers have manipulated prices and otherwise distorted the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains to increase their profits at the expense of consumers (FTC, 2024). Their findings add weight to a broader pattern of apparent malpractice described in a brief from the Groundwork Collaborative (Pancotti & Owens, 2023), which attributes to corporate price manipulation as much as half of the effects of inflation seen in the US in the last half of 2023. In Canada, concerns about similar behaviour are high and arguably justified by precedent (Gregoire, 2023); in 2017, grocers in Canada were found to have collaborated in a price-fixing scheme for bread (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023a). During the post-pandemic period, major Canadian grocers have also enjoyed noteworthy increases in profit and profit-margin (Competition Bureau of Canada 2023b; Oved, 2022; Stanford, 2022; Taylor & Charlebois, 2022). Canadian food prices are also presently in the political spotlight in relation to debates over the merits of carbon taxes as a climate change mitigation strategy; for example, the Conservative Party of Canada recently criticized the Federal carbon pricing regime for being a source of inflation, including of groceries (Wherry, 2023), and attempted to leverage the issue to trigger a national election (Tasker, 2024).

Given the obvious role that food prices can play as a discursive tool in Canadian policy and politics, a sound, science-based understanding of food prices is of critical importance to the effective democratic governance of Canada's food system. Understanding food process is also important to Canadian society at large. The price of food is widely understood as a principal component of poverty, food insecurity, and public health (Headey & Martin, 2016). Access (i.e., availability and affordability) to healthy food has been linked to health outcomes for childhood (physical and intellectual) development, management of chronic diseases, and aggregate public health outcomes such as life expectancy and quality of life (High Level Panel of Experts, 2017). Though the impacts of high food prices are understood to be generally problematic for consumers (and low-income consumers in particular), there remains debate about the role that high and low food prices play in determining *aggregate* poverty and food insecurity (Headey & Martin, 2016), as high food prices can benefit farmers and farm workers and may enable adoption of more sustainable food production practises (Headey & Hirvonen, 2023). Still, increasing food prices have become a central issue facing Canadian society, with implications for the health and well-being of Canadians from coast to coast to coast (Herbert, 2023; Isai, 2023; Miller, 2022).

The importance of food to human health and well-being is underscored by its increasing recognition as a fundamental human right (see Article 25-1in UN, 1948 and Article 11 in UN, 1966), for example, as well as Kent, 2005, and Messer & Cohen, 2007). Unlike many other rights, however, which individuals realise through their own agency and under the protection of the state as part of a social contract, food is an uncommon case of a right that is commonly provisioned by the private sector. Coming to grips with food price dynamics is thus also important, given the fact that food's commodified status introduces a potential incommensurability, if not outright conflict of interest, between people's fundamental right to food and the role of private firms and markets in determining food access and availability (Bellemare, 2015; Kloppenburg, 2005; Meerman & Aphane, 2012).

However, in recent years there appears to be little consensus on what the predominant factors driving food price changes have been, as numerous different positions on the drivers in Canada have been put forward by elected officials, labour groups, the Bank of Canada, members of the public, research reports, and Canadian agribusiness (Bank of Canada, 2023; Bulowski, 2022; Canadian Labour Congress, 2022; Gregoire, 2023; Oved, 2022;). This lack of consensus is perhaps understandable given that the task of explaining food prices is very complex due to the complicated and globalized nature of our food system. Here, we seek to contribute to this discussion with an analysis of prominent reports on food prices in Canada. We approached this work with two research questions in mind:

1. How do these food price studies explain changes in the price of food in Canada?
2. Are the explanations for food price changes scientifically rigorous?

Working with a set of fifty-one reports on food prices in Canada, we employed descriptive coding and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify types and categories of arguments made regarding the drivers of food price change. We adopted a qualitative analytical approach that would allow us to identify the explanations given for food price increases and to understand the ontological framing behind the reports (i.e., the assumptions about the nature of the world that predispose analysts' construction of plausible explanations, e.g., Geels, 2010). We also used the well-known Toulmin model of scientific argumentation to execute a deductive, framework-driven textual analysis of the completeness and rigour of each scientific argument we identified in the reports (Karbach, 1987; Toulmin, 2003). Our goal with the second part of this analysis is not to determine whether the claims made in these reports are correct, but whether they are scientifically rigorous (i.e., constructed and presented in a way that is evaluable by readers and that follows established scientific practice for constructing sound and defensible scientific arguments).

With this work, we contribute to the public good in two ways. First, our review raises concerns about the current role of grey literature in Canadian politics and discourse over food prices, especially if these reports are being presented or interpreted as scientific in nature. Second, we offer potential theoretical and practical reforms that could move these reports in the direction of producing the rigorous and trustworthy evidence Canadians need for understanding food price dynamics in Canada. The reforms we suggest include, as described in Section 4.4, enhanced peer-review processes, improved argument rigour, heightened transparency regarding conflicts of interest and funding sources, and further research effort from additional sources. Through these two contributions, we seek to summarize and contextualize prominent food price studies and offer a path for future research concerned with explaining food prices.

Methods

Identifying reports and our parameters for inclusion

When selecting reports to include in the study, we started with a purposive approach, including reports with which we were already familiar and which are known as contributing to political discourse around food prices in Canada. Specifically, this includes the Canadian Food Price Report series co-published by the Agrifood Analytics Lab and the Arrell Food Institute, as well as a mix of annual and ad hoc reports by Statistics Canada. We chose to start with these reports given our collective knowledge of food systems and food policy discourse in Canada.

To be sure that additional reports from these or other publishers were not overlooked, we also conducted an internet search using a variety of search terms, including "Canadian food prices", "explaining food prices in Canada", "changing costs of food in Canada", "food price changes in Canada", "food price research in Canada", and "food price studies". We also conducted an informal scan of mainstream online Canadian news media (including articles published by the *Toronto Star*, the CBC, CTV News, and the *National Post*) to identify articles covering food prices in Canada and distinguish source materials upon which media coverage was based. These searches reinforced our understanding of the dominant and sole influence of reports from these two publishers, and likewise did not reveal any additional resources beyond those from the two publishers. We opted against performing a meta-analysis or systematic review of peer-reviewed literature, again because the goal of this work was specifically to analyse known policy-facing documents that are regularly noted in media and political discourse. Although grey literature is not necessarily expected to conform to the standards of peer-reviewed science, these public-facing reports are presented with the authority of academic institutions and written in a language that purports an objective and positivist stance. Given the prominent role these reports currently play in public and political discourse, we believe that it is crucial to assess whether they meet scientific criteria for rigour.

We used several criteria to screen reports to ensure they were relevant to our research questions. First, we only included reports in our analysis if they provided explicit explanations for food price changes (either increases or decreases) in Canada. Next, we only evaluated reports written in English (a result of the language proficiency of the research team). Finally, we narrowed the scope to include only reports from the last ten (complete) years and 2023 reports published between January and May 2023. We set this temporal boundary to ensure reports from before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic (a major event for food prices in Canada and globally) were included.

Finally, we also sought out any supplementary materials referenced within the reports we analysed. However, these materials did not yield any additional explanations or supporting materials regarding food price changes beyond those listed in the reports themselves, and thus they ultimately were not included in our sample.

Coding strategy by research question

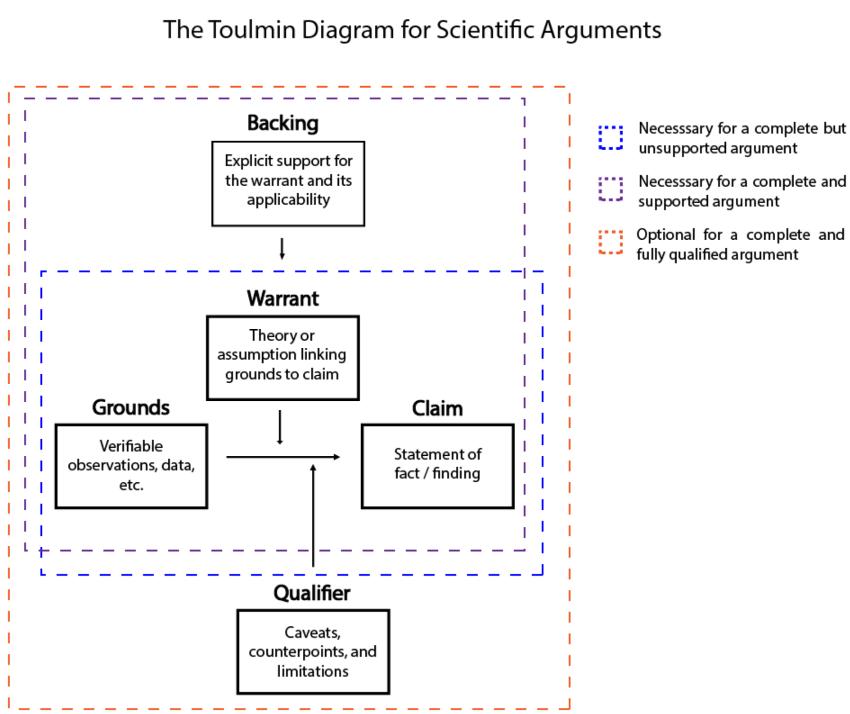
Research question one: How do food price studies explain changes in the price of food in Canada?

We used an inductive approach to thematic analysis (using NVivo Version 17.1; Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify the explanations for changing food prices in Canada provided in the reports. Our first coding pass employed content coding, flagging each claim made regarding changing food prices. Coding was performed primarily by Author two; 100% of the codes assigned in the initial round of coding were reviewed by Author one in collaborative discussion with Author two. We followed this coding with thematic analysis, in which authors one, two, and four collaborated on an iterative process to combine and condense similar codes and organise them into discrete thematic categories and subcategories.

Research question two: Are the explanations for food price increases scientifically rigorous?

To answer our second research question, we assessed the scientific rigour of each claim identified in our thematic coding process by evaluating their completeness against the Toulmin framework for scientific arguments (Figure 1). The Toulmin framework (see Toulmin, 2003) breaks down scientific arguments into various critical and optional components—complete and rigorous scientific arguments, according to Toulmin (2003), possess three key components and two optional components. To be complete, arguments must contain a claim (e.g., that food price was affected by the war in Ukraine), grounds (e.g., evidence that some aspect of the war in Ukraine caused a change in food price), and a warrant: assumptions or theories about the mechanism linking the grounds and the claim (e.g., an economic model or theory that shows that a reduction in grain exports from Ukraine would impact global grain prices). In addition to these three components, the rigour of scientific arguments can be increased by providing backing, (i.e., additional evidence) that supports the relevance and accuracy of the warrant, and one or more qualifiers (e.g., caveats or counterarguments).

Figure 1: The Toulmin diagram for scientific arguments, showing the components of scientific arguments, their relation to each other, and their respective contributions to argument completeness (derived from Toulmin, 2003).



With these five components in mind, we developed a typology of argument rigour (Table 1). Using this typology, we reviewed each claim we identified in our thematic coding process to determine which of the Toulmin dimensions applied. We recorded results on a presence or absence basis and tracked our results in an online tracking sheet. Each presence or absence decision for each Toulmin dimension code was assigned by Author two and reviewed by Author one via discussion to ensure accuracy, and instances of disagreement and uncertainty were resolved through discussion and collaborative analysis.

Finally, we also searched each report for three additional components of research practice: i) evidence that reports had been subjected to any level of peer review (internal, external, blind, etc.); ii) an acknowledgement of funding sources; and iii) a declaration of conflicts of interest.

Table 1: Definitions of different kinds of complete and incomplete arguments, adapted from the Toulmin schematic for scientific arguments (i.e., Karbach, 1987; Toulmin, 1958.

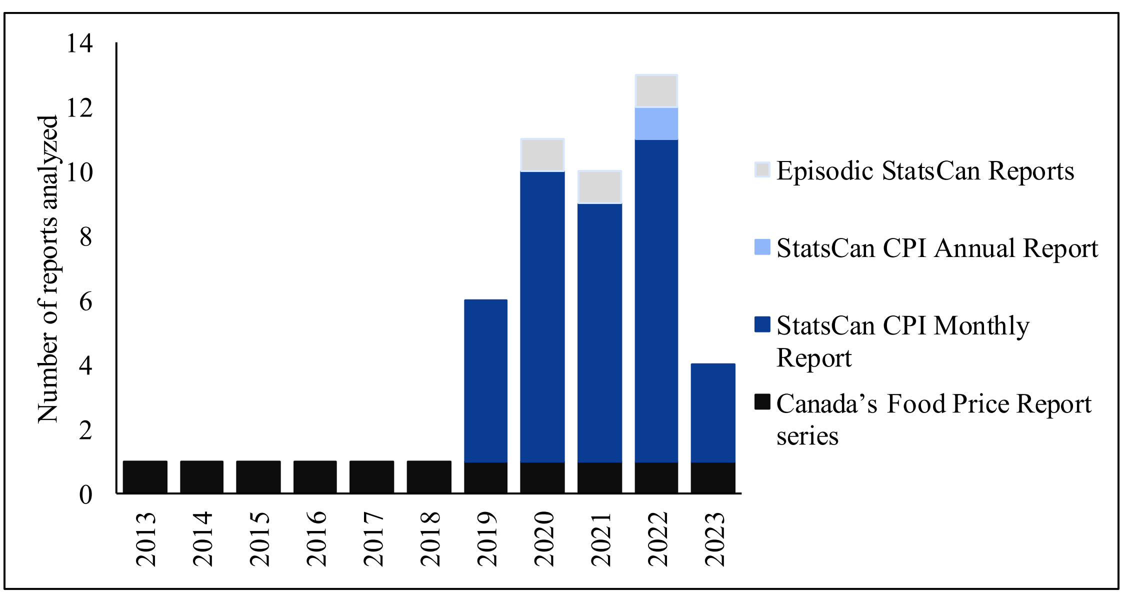
Argument Status	**Elements present**	**Description**
Complete and fully qualified	Backing, warrant, grounds, qualifier	Argument presents evidence to support the claim, connects the evidence logically using a warrant, justifies the warrant with backing, and offers possible qualifiers (e.g., caveats, counterpoints) to the argument
Complete but unqualified	Backing, warrant, grounds	Argument presents evidence to support the claim, connects the evidence logically using a warrant, justifies the warrant with backing, but offers no possible qualifiers (e.g., caveats, counterpoints) to the argument
Complete but unjustified	Backing and warrant	Argument presents evidence to support the claim, connects the claim to the evidence using a warrant, but does not justify the validity or relevance of the warrant (i.e., commits a fallacy of unwarranted assumption)
Incomplete (unwarranted)	Backing	Argument presents evidence to support the claim but does not provide a rationale for connecting the evidence to the claim (i.e., commits a fallacy of relevance)
Incomplete (unsupported)	No elements present	Argument is baseless, in that it lacks any presentation of evidence

Results

We identified fifty-one reports as eligible for analysis (Figure 2 and see Supplementary Materials for a full list of the reports we assessed). The majority of the reports we assessed were published by Statistics Canada (thirty-nine), while Canada's Food Price Report series accounts for the remaining reports (twelve). This collection comprises both periodic (monthly, annual) and *ad hoc* publications. As specified in our inclusion criteria, all reports share the defining feature of offering explanations for changes in the price of food in Canada.

The reports are similar in a number of other respects as well; they are generally less than thirty pages long and are often organised at least in part around significant news relevant to the price of food in Canada in their respective reporting periods. The reports do differ somewhat in their overall objectives and scope, however. Statistics Canada CPI reports analyse the price of different "baskets" of goods and services in the economy, and include healthcare, shelter, and clothing in addition to food, whereas the CFPR series focuses specifically on food prices. While the Statistics Canada reports typically identify and explain price changes from previous periods, the CFPRs explain previous price movements and make projections about the price of food in the future in Canada. Additionally, the CFPRs are more varied in their stated methods, and, in some instances, they include consumer surveys. Despite these different styles, methods, and approaches, the reports included here are generally considered authoritative on the issue of food prices in Canada, as they serve as the basis of innumerable news articles on food prices, and some of their authors have provided testimony to Parliamentary committees and frequent commentary in the media (i.e., Alsharif, 2023; Brehaut, 2023; House of Commons, 2023; Lord, 2023; Moore, 2022).

Figure 2: Reports comprising our sample, listed by source and date. We reviewed fifty-one reports in total across the four source types.

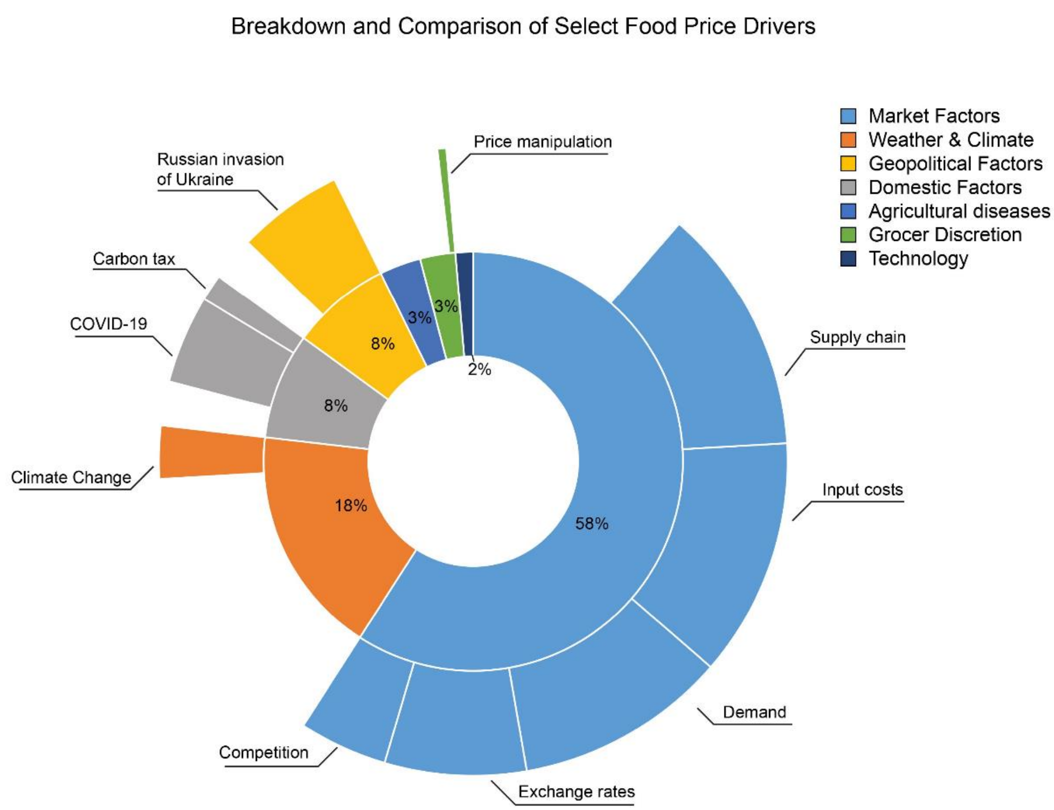


As noted above, we also checked all documents for a declaration of conflicts of interest, an acknowledgement of funding sources, and evidence of peer review. None of the reports contained any mention of or described potential conflicts of interest, disclosed funding, or described an external peer-review process. We discuss the role of these elements of research practise in the context of food price studies in Section 4.4.

What explanations do food price reports provide for changes in the price of food in Canada?

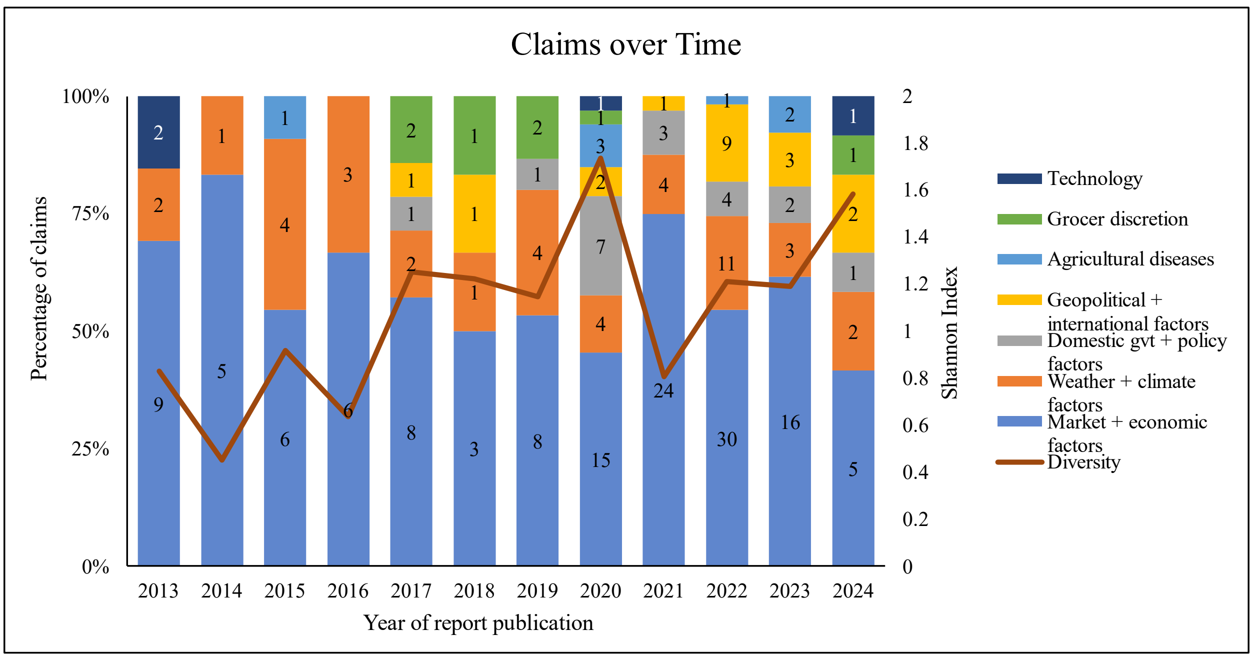
We identified 232 individual claims regarding the drivers of food price changes across the fifty-one reports in our sample. Thematic coding of these claims resulted in seven groups and thirty-two sub-groups of drivers (Figure 3). Market-oriented drivers, such as supply-chain problems, input costs, demand, and exchange rates, are the most discussed drivers across the reports (n=135). Labour costs and shortages occur in this category, but infrequently (n=8). Weather and climate factors are the next most common category of driver (n=41), followed by domestic politics and policy drivers (which includes carbon pricing) (n=19) and international and geopolitical issues drivers (n=19). Rounding out the end of the list were agricultural diseases (n=7), grocer discretion (n=6), and technology (n=4).

Figure 3: The seven categories of food price drivers identified in the reports and the percentage of all claims each category accounts for. Commonly identified sub-categories are presented in the outer ring of the figure. Climate change, the carbon tax, and price manipulation are also presented for comparison. See Supplemental Materials for additional details.



Viewing how claims changed over time (Figure 4), our results suggest an overall increase in the number of claims made to explain changes in the price of food during the study period. This increase is apparent over the entire period but is exaggerated in reports published in 2020, which may be the result of an increased desire to understand the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on food prices. For example, prior to 2020, the Statistics Canada Monthly CPI reports did not include price explanations, but Statistics Canada added them in 2020 and continued to include them in subsequent years. Additionally, while market and economic factors account for a large percentage of claims throughout the study period, the range of themes linked to changing food prices started increasing in 2017.

Figure 4: Number of claims identified by theme category and year. Solid line indicates the relative diversity of claims each year as calculated with the Shannon diversity index (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Dotted line is the smoothed, two-year running trendline.



Are the claims made in food price studies scientifically rigorous?

Of the 232 claims we identified, we found that 164 (71%) were incomplete (unsupported and unwarranted), with 141 (60.7%) of the claims receiving no support and twenty-three (9.9%) receiving only grounds. As per the Toulmin argument definition, only sixty-eight (29.3%) of the claims were made as part of a scientifically "complete" argument (i.e., the claim is linked to at least grounds and a warrant; see Table 1, Table 2, and Figure 5). Canada's Food Price Report Series had the most total claims, and fifty-five (44.4%) of that source's claims could be considered scientifically "complete". This proportion is lower than the Statistics Canada Annual Summary and episodic reports we assessed, though the considerably different number of claims identified between sources is important to factor into any direct comparisons (see Table 2). Eighty-six (94.5%) of the claims presented in the Statistics Canada CPI monthly reports were incomplete, and only five (5.5%) of that source's ninety-one claims could be considered "complete". We summarise the results of our claim audit (as guided by the Toulmin argument) in Figure 5 and Table 2 below.

Figure 5: Sankey diagram showing, from left to right, the number of claims by report, claim theme, and degree of argument completion.

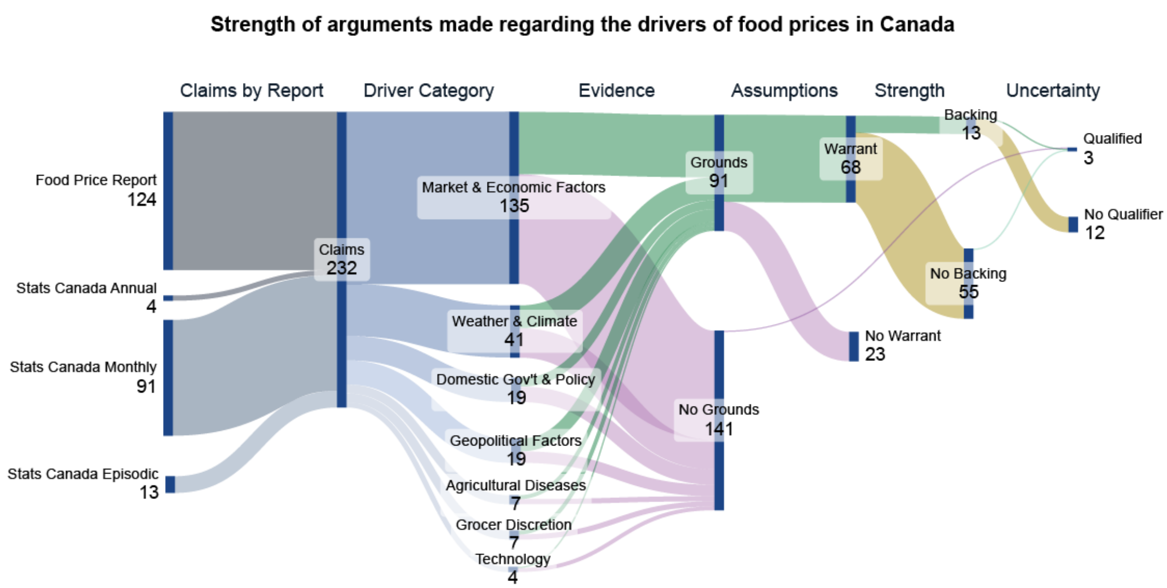


Table 2: Number of reports, claims identified, and "completeness" of arguments by report source.

Publisher	Report type	# of reports assessed	# of claims made	Incomplete arguments		Complete arguments		
				Unsupported arguments	Unwarrented arguments	Complete but unjustified	Complete but unqualified	Complete
Statistics Canada	CPI Monthly reports	35	91	85 (93.4%)	1 (1.1%)	5 (5.5%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Statistics Canada	CPI Annual Summary reports	1	4	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Statistics Canada	Various episodic reports	3	13	7 (53.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (23.1%)	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)
Agri-Food Analytics Lab	Canada's Food Price Report Series	12	124	47 (37.9%)	22 (17.7%)	45 (36.3%)	10 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Total		51	232	141 (60.8%)	23 (9.9%)	55 (23.7%)	12 (5.2%)	1 (0.4%)

Discussion

On the types of food price drivers and grocery agency

The reports identify a wide diversity of drivers as being potentially implicated in changing food prices, which is likely a function of the interconnectedness of markets, the complexity of supply chains, and the number of stakeholders involved in the food system. Unsurprisingly, market factors (i.e., vagaries of currency strength and exchange rates, changes in demand, supply chain dynamics, etc.) make up the lion's share of the explanations provided (n=135 or 58.1% of all claims identified). There is also an unsurprising emphasis on drivers situated in short-term trends and current events, specifically emergencies impacting global food supply chains such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

Interestingly, the reports make little reference to the possible role of grocer and supplier agency in food price dynamics. Only seven (or 3%) of the claims we identified position grocers or suppliers as having agency and influence over the price of food (see Figure 5), implying that consumers are essentially entirely subject to the whims of the market, government decisions, and world events. Relatedly, some noteworthy elements of the design of the food system and the role corporate grocers play within that system are unexamined. Corporate imperatives for growth in revenue, profit, profit margins, and fulfilling fiduciary duties to shareholders are the fundamental goals of companies that are publicly traded (as the major Canadian grocers are). We did not find any instances of the relationship between these structural factors and food prices in the reports we assessed.

Other factors related to grocer agency, i.e., the desire for expanded revenue and profits, appear only fleetingly in the context of the price of food. We found one instance of a report attributing price increases to price manipulation—the CFPR for 2019 makes direct reference to the now well-known bread price-fixing scandal that took place over a fourteen-year period. However, in the previous year's CFPR report, the authors had dismissed the possibility that price-fixing had taken place, writing:

> To suggest that food prices are inflated in Canada is somewhat far-fetched, especially the idea, as some believe, that Canadian consumers are paying too much for bread due to price-fixing schemes. The evidence for this claim is simply not apparent. At the centre of this investigation is a much deeper problem that lies in the food supply chain. (Charlebois et al., 2018, p. 18)

While the 2019 and 2020 reports did acknowledge the scandal, they did not acknowledge the 2018 error or the insufficient argument that supply chain dynamics were to blame. Neither have following years' reports exhibited an increased attention to corporate decisions or malpractice as a driver following this revelation. Given the recent revelations about corporate collusion in the US around prices in food and other sectors, further investigation of the role of the private sector in actively driving food price increases is called for.

Presenting an ensemble of possible and alternative established drivers, from taxes to climate change to fossil fuel markets, and comparing their relative explanatory power would go far towards enhancing the rigour of the arguments these reports present. Without such due diligence, the reports are in danger of reifying an ontological framing of food price as something of a *deus ex machina,* wherein grocers are largely absent of any agency or power; the implication, we argue, is that food prices are inherently capricious and price variability is virtually incurable through policy intervention.

On the roles of weather, climate change, climate policy, and major environmental trends

With respect to environmental factors, the reports often link weather and climate to changes in the price of food. We found forty-one claims (17.6%) that weather (thirty-three) and/or climate change (eight) drove changes in food prices, and all the latter groups appear in the CFPR. We also identified three claims (1.4%) that link climate *policy* to changing food prices, specifically the Government of Canada's carbon pricing system, generally referred to as the "carbon tax". These three claims all appear in a CFPR; the various Statistics Canada reports we assessed did not contain any clear claims of how climate change or the federal carbon pricing system would impact food prices.

Though we identified eleven claims linking climate change to changes in the price of food (eight through environmental impacts and three through policy), most of the climate change discussion in the CFPRs is unaccompanied by specific claims about food price behaviour (e.g., the directionality of price changes). There is widespread sentiment in food systems research that unmitigated climate change will impact food prices in myriad ways, even if the immediate impacts of climate change are experienced elsewhere in the world (Arora, 2019; Bradbear & Friel, 2013; Kotz et al., 2024). The relative lack of attention in these reports to identifying nascent impacts of climate change on food prices represents a missed opportunity for understanding and communicating the impacts of climate change and climate policy on food prices to the media and the public. Understanding and communicating these links are especially important as the relationship between climate change, climate policies such as the carbon tax, and the price of food in Canada has become a major political wedge issue at the federal level (Conservative Party of Canada, 2023; CPAC, 2023; Dawson, 2023).

Other potential environmental factors related to food production and the resilience of the food system are overlooked in the reports. There is significant evidence, for example, that (long-term and accelerating) ecological declines, biodiversity decline, and collapse of pollinator populations, among other similar issues, have implications for food production and thus food costs (Coghlan & Bhagwat, 2022; Reilly et al., 2020). Though "ecological threats" were mentioned twice by the 2020 CFPR, they were not accompanied by a discussion of how they would impact prices. We did not identify any instances of these environmental factors being cited to explain changes in the price of food in the reports we assessed.

On scientific rigour

Readers should know that most arguments made in these reports are, as per the Toulmin framework, incomplete and lacking in rigour. Nearly two-thirds (60.7%) of the claims we identified appear entirely unsupported, in that no grounds (i.e., direct evidence) are presented in support. Just under a third of all arguments (n=68, or 29.3%) pass the minimum threshold for completeness. Yet even reports with technically complete arguments still fail to offer the backing and qualifiers that would be necessary for readers to fully evaluate the arguments being presented. All told, only one claim in the entire sample set (coming from a Statistics Canada episodic report citing unfavourable weather) satisfies all the Toulmin conditions for a complete and rigorous scientific argument. Given the importance of food prices for human health and food security, these low rates of effective scientific argumentation suggest that these reports should not be considered scientifically rigorous or interpreted as constituting evidence by policymakers, at least in their current form.

Strengthening understanding, transparency, and accountability for food prices in Canada

Our results suggest the current landscape of prominent grey literature contains constrained analytical framings and weak argumentation, limiting our collective ability to understand what is happening in the food system, to what extent and where agency exists, and what can and should be done to ensure that food prices are appropriate and fair. At best, the reports reviewed here can be thought of as an incremental step forward into understanding why food prices in Canada change. They offer an overview, albeit not an entirely comprehensive or well-defended one, of the variety of factors and events which may influence, if not determine, food prices. At worst, the content in the reports and the strength of the claims presented could obfuscate the true mix of drivers causing food prices in Canada to change, with implications for public discourse and public policy.

Other sources with the potential to contribute to high-quality and rigorous explanations for food price changes have also provided evidence that could be considered incomplete. Executive officers for major Canadian grocers, who have been at the centre of the food price issue, have said in testimonies in Parliament that price gouging on groceries is not occurring in their stores, and that the increased grocer profitability that has coincided with increased food prices is the result of strong performance in other departments (namely pharmaceuticals and beauty products; see Competition Bureau Canada, 2023b; Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, 2023). However, major grocers do not publish food-specific results in public disclosures. While grocers stated in their testimony that they have provided information to the Competition Bureau to underscore their position that they are not benefitting from increasing food prices, the Bureau has commented on the provision of that information, stating:

> The Bureau is not able to disclose the specific information it was provided, owing to the confidentiality requirements of the Competition Act. However, in general, the Bureau can say that the level of cooperation varied significantly [among grocers], and was not fulsome. In many instances, the Bureau was not able to obtain complete and precise financial data, despite its repeated requests. (Competition Bureau Canada, 2023b, p. 24)

Between the food price reports we assessed and the lack of cooperation from major grocers with Competition Bureau requests, the Canadian public is left with an incomplete understanding of what is happening in the food system and what truly explains price changes. In an effort to contribute towards an improved understanding of food prices (and, ideally, improved policy and public discourse), we briefly sketch theoretical and practical options for reform below.

First, increasing transparency and social literacy regarding the drivers of food prices is critical to achieving a just, food-secure, and sustainable society. There is much recognition in the sustainable food systems literature of the need to better account for the true ecological and societal costs of our food, for example by removing unsustainable subsidies and unmasking the hidden ecological "externalities" (i.e., degradation) in the production process that currently keep food prices as low as they are (Baker et al., 2020). Internalizing such costs within production, however, would very likely increase the price of food. By promoting transparency, we can make sure that food is priced accurately, reflecting all the social and ecological costs associated with its production. This approach will also allow us to more precisely adjust other social policies, like minimum wages and basic incomes, to match the true cost of living. Without transparency and a sound understanding of food price dynamics, however, it will be impossible to ensure that food price increases are serving these social and ecological goals, rather than benefiting only the accumulation of wealth by the private sector.

Structural and procedural reforms around food price research could also help strengthen the evidence explaining changes in the cost of food in Canada and globally. Government reports and grey literature reports (which constitute our entire sample) are fundamentally different types of publications than research articles published in peer-reviewed journals and are not necessarily subject to the same norms and practices as are articles in (high-quality) academic journals. As we note in Section three, none of the CFPRs we assess describe their review process, include clear statements disclosing their funding sources, or include clear statements disclosing any conflicts of interests which may exist. While this may in large part be in keeping with the norms and practices of grey literature, our results, together with the critical nature of this issue to public health and well-being, lead us to argue that a higher standard is necessary. Reforms could look different for the various publishers, which we explain below.

With respect to the Statistics Canada (i.e., government) reports, a transparent and open peer-review process could strengthen their argumentation. Standards and procedures exist for establishing transparent external peer-review processes for government science issues that closely affect the Canadian public. For example, the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) was created following the collapse of northern cod in the Northwest Atlantic to enhance peer review within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). CSAS is an arms-length body dedicated to co-ordinating peer review of the science produced by DFO scientists. Peer review under this body takes place in meetings where experts external to DFO are invited to review and debate data, methods, and results, as well as the formal advice DFO Science provides based on the findings. The process is transparent, open, and inclusive of different perspectives, following the standards set out in the Government of Canada's Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Use of Science and Technology Advice in Government Decision Making (the SAGE principles, see for example DFO, 2020). It is worth considering if such a system of inclusive, challenge-based peer-review experts may be warranted in the case of food price studies in Canada.

The same sort of open and challenge-based peer-review system that has worked previously in the production of government science may not work well for grey literature reports produced by teams of academics like the CFPRs. But the arguments in the CFPR reports could still be strengthened, perhaps through adherence to an argumentation framework like the Toulmin argument. At a minimum, it would be helpful for the reports to provide evidence for underlying claims, cite appropriate academic reports, and clearly communicate levels of uncertainty. The latter could take inspiration from the standards for communicating uncertainty established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(Mastrandrea et al., 2011). Additionally, clear declarations of funding sources and conflict of interest statements would allow readers to assess the claims being made, weigh their conclusions, and understand their implications more effectively. These statement-oriented research practices would be easy to implement.

We also acknowledge that many readers go to the CFPR for food price forecasting; we think this service will also be improved by adopting a more open and peer-driven process. For years the arctic science community, for example, used an open ensemble approach to forecasting annual sea ice behaviour, a process that not only created more robust forecasts but also advanced sea ice science (Hamilton & Stroeve, 2016). It is worth exploring whether creative solutions for increasing transparency and inclusion such as this could improve food price forecasting and help build our primary knowledge base about why prices change.

Finally, while the options for reform we outline above apply to the current landscape of food price research in Canada, expanding the number of sources and studies could also help strengthen the overall understanding of food price dynamics. The current discourse and media coverage of food prices in Canada rely largely on the two sources we assess here, which is perhaps too concentrated a reliance on a small number of sources. Given the complexity of the global food system and the numerous factors impacting price changes, additional perspectives published in public-facing venues could improve the robustness of food price understanding in Canada, with benefits for public policy and Canadians.

Conclusion

The increasing cost of food has been a central topic of public discourse, public policy, and politics in Canada as well as in multiple other locales. Producing high-quality research and evidence is an imperative for the food research community, given the contribution the food system makes to human health and well-being. It is paramount that such research be able to accurately inform policy and discourse and to understand where agency exists and what can be done, if anything, to ensure fairness in food pricing.

Our assessment of prominent government and academic reports suggests that the explanations provided for changes in the price of food in Canada are analytically limited and scientifically incomplete. It is worth emphasizing that our results do not suggest that the claims made in the various reports we assess are incorrect, but rather that they are presented in a way that is scientifically incomplete and therefore makes critical evaluation of the claims presented in the reports difficult. Incomplete argumentation is a significant issue given the influence the reports likely have on public policy and public debates.

We suggest theoretical and practical reforms for efforts seeking to understand and effectively communicate the multi-faceted drivers of the price of food in Canada and elsewhere. Better attention to what constitutes rigorous arguments about causation, for example following a framework such as Toulmin, would result in a knowledge base that is more complete in terms of the evidence being leveraged, and more transparent about uncertainty, alternative explanations, and conflicts of interest. Drawing on lessons from science production in other sectors, we suggest a "challenge-based" peer-review process and the adoption of a set of scientific principles seeking to be inclusive, open, transparent, and in line with the SAGE Principles deployed in other areas of government science. Finally, broadening the landscape of public-facing, accessible research into food price dynamics could improve the understanding of food price dynamics and allow for additional contextualization of the existing set of such reports.

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Original Research Article

Sovereignty of and through food: A decolonial feminist political ecology of Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9

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Abstract

"Food sovereignty," a term conceived by peasant agriculturalists in South America, has become ubiquitous worldwide in academic and activist circles advocating for greater local control over local food. Its use has been adopted by various actors in North America, most notably by agriculturalists that tend to be small-scale, family-run, or permaculture focussed. While Indigenous food sovereignty has emerged as an adaptation of this concept, ecological, economic, social, and political opportunities and constraints in different locations across Turtle Island make its widespread application challenging, especially in contexts where communities do not want, or cannot (for a variety of reasons) eat exclusively from the land. In addition, "food sovereignty" can become a chimera in contexts where the "Crown" has absolute and final "sovereignty" over the land, which they have demonstrated through multiple enforcements across Turtle Island. Using a decolonial feminist lens within a political ecology community of practice, this paper describes and critiques current and historic framings of northern Ontario boreal forests as variously and simultaneously scarce and abundant. It also analyzes the ways that these framings have been discursively and materially constructed through colonial social, ecological, economic, and political impositions. It asks whether the concept of food sovereignty adequately challenges these constructions. Ultimately, this paper suggests that thinking about Indigenous food sovereignty as sovereignty *of* and *through* food may better describe the process, importance, and potential inherent in traditional and alternative Indigenous food harvesting and distribution practices in First Nations communities in northern Ontario, and indeed, beyond.

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Résumé

Le terme « souveraineté alimentaire », conçu par les agriculteurs paysans d'Amérique du Sud, est devenu omniprésent dans les cercles universitaires et militants qui prônent un plus grand contrôle local sur l'alimentation locale. Il a été adopté par divers acteurs en Amérique du Nord, plus particulièrement par les agriculteurs qui tendent à œuvrer à petite échelle, en gestion familiale ou d'après les principes de la permaculture. La souveraineté alimentaire autochtone est apparue comme une adaptation de ce concept, cependant les possibilités et les contraintes écologiques, économiques, sociales et politiques dans certains endroits de l'Île de la Tortue rendent la généralisation de son application difficile, en particulier dans les contextes où les communautés ne veulent pas ou ne peuvent pas (pour diverses raisons) se nourrir exclusivement de produits de leur territoire. En outre, la « souveraineté alimentaire » peut devenir une chimère dans le contexte où la « Couronne » détient la « souveraineté » absolue et définitive sur cette terre, ce qu'elle a démontré par de multiples mesures appliquées sur l'Île de la Tortue. En utilisant une perspective féministe décoloniale au sein d'une communauté de pratique d'écologie politique, cet article décrit et critique les conceptions actuelles et historiques des forêts boréales du nord de l'Ontario qui en ont fait diversement et simultanément des espaces de rareté et d'abondance. Il analyse également les façons dont ces conceptions ont été construites discursivement et matériellement à travers des abus coloniaux de nature sociale, écologique, économique et politique. Il pose la question de savoir si le concept de souveraineté alimentaire remet en cause ces constructions de manière adéquate. En fin de compte, cet article suggère que la réflexion sur la souveraineté alimentaire autochtone en tant que souveraineté de et par l'alimentation peut mieux décrire le processus, l'importance et le potentiel inhérents aux pratiques traditionnelles et alternatives de récolte et de distribution des aliments autochtones dans les communautés des Premières Nations du nord de l'Ontario et, en fait, au-delà.

Introduction

While food insecurity is felt by fifteen percent of Canadians (Tarasuk et al., 2022), it impacts nearly fifty percent of on-reserve Indigenous households in Canada (Batal et al., 2021). For years, popular media, community, activist, and academic circles, as well as a scathing report from the United Nations' Special Rapporteur a decade ago, have brought attention to these grossly inequitable statistics (De Schutter, 2012). The issue has been extensively studied from health and wellness perspectives (Adamson, 2011; Borras & Mohamed, 2020; Gyapay, 2022; Imbeault et al., 2011; Pal et al., 2013; Ray et al., 2019), critical social justice perspectives (Coté, 2016; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019; Keske, 2021; LeBlanc &

Burnett, 2017; Lemke & Delormier, 2017; Levkoe et al., 2019; Morrison, 2011), and community resurgence perspectives (Cherofsky, 2013; Daigle, 2015; Daigle, 2019; Martens et al., 2016; Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Settee & Shukla, 2020). In response to this work and the accompanying public outcry, numerous programs have been implemented to attempt to address food shortages, either from a government funding approach (i.e., Nutrition North subsidy), non-governmental funding and research agencies (Turner, 2022), community led land-based initiatives (Ferreira et al., 2021; Gaudet, 2021; Kamal et al., 2015; Loukes et al., 2022; Lowitt et al., 2019), or a combination of all three. Despite significant efforts, food insecurity prevails in northern Ontario First Nations (Robidoux et al., 2021). It is not my goal to dismantle or critique these efforts, but to bring attention to the structural factors outside of local food initiatives that continue to contain and constrain them.

As an alternative to food security approaches, which focus on a more apolitical conception of food shortages such as using caloric intake and absolute amounts of food as indicators of success, food sovereignty has emerged as a political framework that highlights the social and economic roots that impede local control over local food sources and lead to food shortages (Chappell, 2018; Jarosz, 2014). While it is crucial that food access inequities are addressed, the focus on a "food" crisis centres the scarcity of affordable, nutritious, preferred food and easily falls into environmental (e.g., climate change), individual (e.g., food choices), and geographical (e.g., remoteness) explanations and solutions. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the root causes of food shortages in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are colonial policies that continue to control the movement of Indigenous bodies, disconnecting people, families, spiritualities, and governance from the land in order to make space for settlers, land use management practices (e.g., parks and tourism development, etc.), and resource extraction. It has been well documented that in some locations food scarcity was engineered (Daschuk, 2013) and in others it was a direct result of increased settlement and exploitative industries which led to the destruction of land, forests, and river systems motivated by primitive accumulation and economic growth. In this context, the crisis is not one of food, but of colonialism, modernity, development, and capitalist resource exploitation. Lack of access to and control over adequate, affordable, nutritious, and desirable food sources is a symptom of a failing economic, political, cultural, and social system that has imposed itself on an ecosystem which cannot support it.

I come from a mix of German, Scottish, and Anishinaabe relatives, all of whom impact the way I move through the world, what I pay attention to, how I come to know, and how I understand. My grandfather was enfranchised as a child in 1921, regaining his status (6(1)) as well as my father's and uncles' (6(2)) under Bill C-31 in 1985. I do not have status. I have been learning more about my grandfather's community in southern Ontario through manoomin harvesting with my uncle and our friend, an avid manoomin harvester and caretaker. While this experience helps to ground, shape, and embody my perspective and work on Indigenous food sovereignty and traditional food harvesting, I am still learning. There is much I do not know. I live in a white body, was raised in various predominantly white suburban communities, and have attended various western educational institutions. Over the last four years, I have worked, visited, and spoken with individuals from some Treaty 9 communities on different local food initiatives, from increasing capacity for traditional food harvesting, processing, and distribution, to creating community and household kitchen gardens. While these experiences have undoubtedly helped to shape my nascent understanding, as a visitor to the region, I cannot represent the myriad ways food sovereignty is conceptualized, desired, rejected, and worked towards in the vastly different communities in this region of northern Ontario. I do not attempt to do this.

Instead, my purpose is to analyze what we mean as scholars, activists, educators, traditional food harvesters, and gardeners by "food sovereignty". Is the concept important as a process and goal, or does using it distract from the broader political structures that by their very existence prevent this vision from being realized? This paper begins by theoretically analyzing food sovereignty from a decolonial feminist lens operationalized within political ecology's community of practice. Then, I will outline a brief history of the framings of food shortages throughout the fur trade to the signings of Treaty 9. Next, I will overview the more recent and current colonial constraints that Treaty 9 First Nations are working within, pushing against, and consciously ignoring while improving food access. Finally, I will discuss how food harvesters and other land-users are reclaiming sovereignty—not *over* food, but *of* and *through* food. This view joins scholars who see food sovereignty as a process towards decolonization (Daigle, 2019; Grey & Patel, 2015; Kamal et al., 2015), but centres Indigenous land restitution as an imperative goal or entry point. Without this, food sovereignty risks working towards a metaphorical conception of decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is not to argue that traditional food harvesting activities which work to decolonize minds, languages, and knowledges are futile, but to argue that, although this is an integral element of decolonization, it is not complete without land restitution efforts, such as Land Back. While this refers to the redistribution of land, it also refers to the resurgence and autonomy of Indigenous governance, jurisdiction, law, language, culture, and lifeways on that land, and requires the colonial state to recall and honour the meaning and spirit of the Treaties from the perspectives of the communities that signed them. In conclusion, this paper will suggest that sovereignty *of* and *through* food may be a more powerful and conceptually accurate inversion of "food sovereignty" through which Indigenous presence, resurgence, and decolonial movements are asserted.

Theoretical perspectives

Decolonial feminist lenses "set anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist form of feminism apart from others" (Paramaditha, 2022, p. 34) and have much uptake among Indigenous feminist thinkers in the settler-colonial context of North America (Barker, 2017; Ferreira et al., 2022; LaRocque, 2017; Nickel & Fehr, 2020). Using this lens to analyze food sovereignty theory and discourse joins and expands the community of practice of political ecologists. Political ecology practitioners question the division between social and ecological systems and are critical of concepts such as ecosystem limits by pointing to socio-economic, political, and power structures which influence and often dictate relationships to land (Robbins, 2012; Tilzey, 2018). While political ecology offers a framework which helps to recognize and break down colonial narratives, decolonial feminist theories rebuild by emphasizing the imperative of shifting the "loci of enunciation" in order to achieve the "epistemic disobedience" necessary for social transformation (Mignolo, 2000, 2009; Paramaditha, 2022).

A decolonial feminist political ecology of food sovereignty

Food sovereignty stresses local control over local food systems and highlights the global political, economic, and government structures which work to contain and constrain the options communities have to exercise this control. The current and most popular use of the term, as coined by peasant agricultural group *La Via Campesina* (LVC) at the Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, has become the dominant understanding of food sovereignty globally. They defined food sovereignty as:

> the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural system. It puts those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007, p. 9)

However, this term and associated definition does not satisfy everyone. For one, the term "sovereignty" has classical definitions related to a "state's legal control over a particular geographical area and its population" (Kamal, 2015, p. 564) and is connected to the notions of private property and resource accumulation (Menser, 2014). Referring to the term "sovereignty", Louis Bird (2023), an Elder and researcher from Peawanuck in northern Ontario, states:

> to call this land our own in terms of Whiteman language in the legal system and also in institution, we speak forked tongue...explain this or saying this in Whiteman's language, I feel very foolish. I should be speaking in my own language. (p. 3)

Food sovereignty advocates have worked to distinguish the term from its colonial roots by arguing that food sovereignty is opposed to capitalist accumulation and privatization. Second, while framing access to food as a right has been argued to be integral to achieving food security and sovereignty (Keske, 2021), using a rights-based framework inherently assumes that rights must be bestowed upon local food producers by the state. This implies an acceptance of the sovereignty of the state. However, extending more rights to more people does not change the "fundamental nature of the problem—the sustained imposition of alien economic and socio-cultural structures" (Leblanc & Burnett, 2017, p. 20). In a settler-colonial state such as Canada, "rights-based approaches do not offer meaningful restoration of Indigenous homelands and food sovereignty" (Corntassel, 2012, p. 93), "can only take struggles for land reclamation and justice so far" (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012, p. 151), and fail to recognize Indigenous peoples' political sovereignty (Morrison, 2011). To address Indigenous concerns and account for the inextricable link between Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous political resurgence, advocates have urged for food sovereignty to move beyond rights (Coté, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015). Third, the term food sovereignty has been used in contexts that obscure settler-colonialism. For example, the term has been adopted in Canada by many small-holder family-run farms as well as by the permaculture movement (Food Secure Canada, 2022). These versions of food sovereignty are depoliticized and agri-centric (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019), leaving little room for harvesting activities such as gathering, hunting, and fishing (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020). Tilzey (2018) argues that the concept of food sovereignty has "become increasingly diffuse as it has been embraced by an expanding array of class and class fractional interests" (p. 4). Finally, Dawn Morrison (2011) asserts that "food sovereignty" was not used historically in Indigenous communities—instead, this concept was a "living reality" (p. 97). Morrison (2011, 2020) nuances the concept of "food sovereignty" through her development of *Indigenous* food sovereignty, which accounts for the contours of Indigenous food systems that, although in many cases do include agriculture and cultivation (e.g., manoomin), also rely on harvesting medicines, mammals, birds, and fish. Indigenous food sovereignty focusses on the sacredness of food, participation in traditional practices of harvesting food, and involvement in policies that support and protect Indigenous food systems (Morrison, 2011, 2020). This conceptual framework has been used in a variety of contexts, including remote, rural, and urban environments (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2021) and Indigenous health (Ray et al., 2019). Morrison's (2011, 2020) definition of Indigenous food sovereignty is broad enough to encapsulate Indigenous food systems across Turtle Island which are shaped by "diverse dietary practices, ecological features, geographical variations, and social-political as well as historical experiences (e.g., residential school systems)" (Settee and Shukla, 2020, p. 4). These experiences vary widely, from abundant salmon fisheries and modern Treaties on the west coast to more minimally productive black spruce forest stands and political legacies of Treaty 9 in northern Ontario.

Importantly, political ecologists remind us not to look at the ways that ecosystems *are* limited or scarce but, instead, the ways they have been *made* scarce (Robbins, 2012). For example, although northern Ontario is considered a region of low bio-productivity and is therefore considered scarce in some regards (e.g., boreal caribou and moose populations), it is and has been considered abundant in others, such as beaver furs, hydro-electric potential, and minerals such as diamond, chromium, palladium, and nickel. Indeed, the continued exploitation of these latter resources is part of the creation of the scarcity of the former. In this context, where federal and provincial colonial Acts, policies, and northern resource extraction continue to *create* ecological scarcity of food sources, what is the pathway towards food sovereignty? From a political ecology perspective, how do social relations shape the ecological "capacity" of the land? From a decolonial feminist lens, who is being asked to develop solutions (Ferreira et al., 2022)?

Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck's (2011) distinction between "progressives" and "radicals" in food sovereignty work is an important guide to answering these questions. Tilzey (2018) argues that "if food sovereignty is to realize its full potential, by necessarily contesting the ecological *and* social contradictions of capitalism, it should embrace the counter-hegemony of the 'radicals'" (p. 4), who move beyond "localizing" and "greening" food systems by advocating for social relational change through land redistribution. This aligns with the ways that decolonial feminists draw caution to decolonizing rhetoric, wherein these terms risk "losing their radical origins as they become more mainstream and give the impression that something has been accomplished" (Paramaditha, 2022, p. 36). In this same way, I hope to hold food sovereignty accountable to itself, and myself accountable to its use.

Historical social, economic, and political impositions

It is important to note that available academic literature creates an incomplete perspective of the history of the Treaty 9 region of northern Ontario before, during, and after the fur trade. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) provides the most consistent recordings of people, furs, and food between 1670 and 1940, along with some anthropological and missionary accounts. These accounts will always be problematic as they carry with them an outsider, visitor, and/or intruder perspective, which can easily fall into the romanticization, misinterpretation or "Othering" that travel writing and anthropological accounts of non-European communities have long been accused of by post-colonial and decolonial writers (Loomba, 2005; Said, 1978; Smith, 1999). There is a growing accumulation of and access to oral records, such as Elder Louis Bird's Ourvoices.ca.

The thousands of lakes, rivers, streams, peat bogs, and wetlands of the boreal forest ecosystem were formed by glacial retreat and advancement and make up fifty-eight percent of Canada's land mass, which varies greatly depending on latitude and proximity to the coast (Golden et al., 2015; Steegman Jr., 1983a). Its climate experiences wide variation (from -40°C in the winter to 30°C in the summer), with summers lasting three months and long winters making up most of the rest of the year, often with severe weather due to continental polar and Arctic air masses (Golden et al., 2015). The landforms, climatic factors (snow, ice, wind), disturbances, vegetation dynamics, and animal dispersion combine to "create a complex and sharply defined mosaic" which Steegman Jr. (1983a) refers to as "patchiness" (p. 48). In response, a "diffuse" subsistence economy developed, which has several advantages and requires much flexibility and adaptability (Steegman Jr., 1983a). It is commonly cited that small, kin-based groups of ten to fifteen people would travel together, following land mammals in the winter and gathering together in the summers around sources of fish (Bird, 2020; Steegman Jr., 1983a). Steegman Jr. (1983b) argues that "in the face of constantly changing resources and movements of people, a flexible kinship and social structure would be most adaptive" (p. 345). Before the traders designated "chiefs" at trading posts, the Anishinaabe (*Ojibwe)*, Cree, and Anishininew (*Oji-Cree)* of northern Ontario did not have official leaders and were not part of bands—their ties were through family (Long, 2010). Rogers' (1983) research shows that summer gatherings were generally made up of several hunting groups with one male leader, followed because of his hunting abilities, spiritual powers, generosity, and wisdom, although people did not need to follow his advice. The infrequency of large animals in the boreal forest made gifting an important economic and social exchange to ensure general survival by "scattering economic risk" (Steegman Jr., 1983b, p. 253), whereby groups abundant in resources would offer a feast to another until they were out of food, trusting that they would be similarly supported in the likely chance they would require it in the future (Rogers, 1983). Indeed, pre-contact, it has also been argued that "the Cree population would've had abundant resources most of the time" (Winterhalder, 1983a, p. 236).

Fur trading posts were typically established around areas where First Nations families already congregated (Long, 2010). By the nineteenth century, there was a greater congregation around these posts, however, families would still spend most of the year moving freely through the bush and gathering in the summers, much in the way they had done before the arrival of the traders (Rogers, 1983). Although it is often cited that congregation around posts was motivated by access to the fur trade market as well as to European goods and foods, intermarriage and family ties were likely another strong draw. Child's (2012) work highlights the important role that women played in the fur trade in the Great Lakes region. It was advantageous for a fur trader to marry an Anishinaabe woman from a prominent family in the community, as her knowledge of food harvesting, language, and her wide kin networks sustained the traders socially, economically, and politically.

Winterhalder (1983a) argues that "irregular, partially phased, and dramatic population fluctuations make it impossible to assign a value to the carrying capacity of this environment" (p. 235), yet it is often stated that this congregation around fur trading posts led to an overharvesting of animals and to scarce hunting in the region. During this time period (between 1706 to 1840), HBC records indicate there were eleven examples of hunger, ten reports of famine, and four reports of death by starvation (Steegman Jr., 1983b). Long (2010) attributes famines during the fur trade years to corporate competition along with a corresponding period of geothermal cooling. Fritz et al. (1993) similarly contrast the overpopulation theory, arguing that, at this point, the human population was still too small in northern Ontario for overexploitation to have been a major factor and that pressures such as climate and habitat disturbance (e.g., fire) would have had more of an impact on animal populations.

Focussing on population-driven depletion of animal sources could distract from other pressures on food systems, such as changes in tenure and family trap lines (Rogers, 1983), series of disease epidemics working in concert followed by grief and recovery from the losses (Hurlich & Steegman, Jr., 1983; Lytwyn, 1999), corporate competition between the HBC and the North West Company (NWC) (Steegman Jr.,1983a; Long, 2010), shifts in hunting schedules (Hurlich & Steegman Jr., 1983), industrial developments (Festa-Bianchet et al., 2011), and conservation policies. Eventually, the declining fur trade forced HBC to reluctantly sell Rupert's Land to Canada for $1.5 million in 1869. While Duncan Campbell Scott (1906), a federal commissioner for Treaty 9, explains the relationship between HBC and the First Nations hunters and trappers of the fur trade as a "sort of slavery" (p. 582), Long (2010) argues that trappers "had coexisted with fur traders for two centuries in a symbiotic relationship that usually benefitted both parties" (p. 352). Child's (2012) work demonstrates that, in the Great Lakes regions, it was beneficial for the fur traders to adopt Anishinaabe languages and customs in order to form respectful and trusting relationships. This relationship experience with fur trading companies such as the HBC and Northwest Company was vastly different than the relationship with the government of Canada, which was solidified through Treaty 9.

The Treaty 9 signings, which took place between 1905 and 1906, were unique among the treaties as the negotiations took place between Canada and Ontario without any input from the First Nations (Long, 2010). When communities signed the treaty, each person received four dollars, and each family of five received one square mile of land on parcels called "reserves", while the swath of land they once considered home or "pantry" (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020) was "ceded" to the Crown. This land distribution system is severely out of alignment with sustaining food systems in the boreal forest, in which each family needs to range over a territory of fifty to 100 square miles for two-thirds of the year (Long, 2010). The reserve system demonstrates either a conscious effort to disconnect Indigenous families from their food systems in order to create dependency on the state, or a deep misunderstanding of the vast amounts of land that animals such as moose and caribou, which remain important food sources to communities, require to subsist in the boreal forest ecosystem (Magoun et al., 2005; Timmermann & McNicol, 1988). While each community was told that they could "hunt and fish as they always have," Treaty 9 further stipulates that "saving and excepting the land is needed for mining, lumber, or settlement" (James Bay Treaty (Treaty 9), 1905). Chief Missabay of Osnaburgh First Nation rightly questioned: "well for all of this, we will have to give up our hunting and live on the land you give us, and how can we live without hunting?" (Long, 2010, p. 293). Eventually, communities north of the Albany River, whose hunters were being harassed by the Department of Lands and Forest and who were also experiencing the encroachment of miners and loggers, sought inclusion in Treaty 9 as they believed it would be an avenue to protect their ability to sustain themselves (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011). They signed the Treaty 9 adhesions in 1929 to 1930.

Colonial and Indigenous understandings and intentions of treaties differ vastly. Mills (2017) argues that from an Anishinaabeg perspective, rather than a legal document akin to a contract, Treaties are a binding law of how to be in right relationship with one another. For example, foundational treaties between Indigenous Peoples and the British Crown, such as the Royal Proclamation (1763) and the Treaty of Niagara (1764) represented by the Covenant Chain and Twenty-Four Nations wampum, symbolize an ongoing and living relationship between nations that are unique but choose to "stand together in a relationship" (Mills, 2017, p. 239). Mills (2017) points to an important distinction between Indigenous languages of "treaty partners" and Canada's language of "treaty rights". He states that Anishinaabe constitutional order strives for harmony instead of justice, made up of individuals "*living in right relation*" (Mills, 2017, p. 236).

Yet, this was not the reality of Treaty 9. Although First Nations were guaranteed that their livelihoods would "in no way be interfered with" (Long, 2010, p. 170) by signing Treaty 9, hunters became subject to provincial game laws when outside the boundaries of their reserves (Rogers, 1983). This, assisted by increased air transportation access in the area, allowed an increase in patrol, and the game wardens were able to confiscate furs and arrest trappers (Rogers, 1983). Ontario's wildlife and fish legislation, enforced through "amisk okimaaw" (*beaver boss*) (Long, 2010, p. 332), implemented game laws that controlled hunting and trapping seasons and harvest limits, resulting in uncertainty in people's abilities to survive winters (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011).

Treaty signings were only the beginning of the ways that the Dominion of Canada created a physical, discursive, and political container in which First Nations of northern Ontario could exercise traditional harvesting rights. Along with limiting the physical space within which communities could practice traditional food systems, the Canadian government also enforced policies, governance, and economies which disrupted families, knowledges, and intergenerational learning, such as the *Indian Act* (1876), Indian Residential Schools (IRS), and the wage labour economy. Morrison (2020) explains:

> Forced assimilation into Indian residential schools and participation in the capitalist wage economy has led to the breakdown of traditional social structures and intergenerational transfer of knowledge and has disconnected families and communities from one another and the land, plants, and animals that provide us with our food. (p. 24)

Streit & Mason (2017) outline the ways that Indigenous food systems in northern Ontario were intentionally destroyed as they interfered with assimilation strategies (i.e., residential schooling and missionary activities) that were only effective when people stayed in their communities. As impactful as these impositions were, Indigenous families did and continue to resist these attempts—some by refusing to attend schools and others by attending them to learn the language and tools necessary to challenge the colonial government.

Despite resistances, these pressures have worked in myriad ways to limit the potential realizabilities of Indigenous food sovereignty, allowing the Government of Canada to support community-led initiatives for "food sovereignty" that will not actually challenge settler claims to land. However, First Nations communities in northern Ontario have always and continue to resist, negotiate, ignore, and defy these imposed constraints, although not without significant costs.

Ongoing colonial impositions

As has been outlined above, Treaty 9's imposition of the reserve systems was a "radical change" for Indigenous food systems, which depended on traveling long distances following food (Long, 2010, p. 92) and years of experience and intergenerational knowledge transmission on the land. This was significantly disrupted by mandated attendance of all children at IRS as per the Indian Act. The intergenerational impacts of the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuses experienced at IRS have been extensively documented (Bombay et al., 2009, 2011, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015). Hunger was an extremely common experience in residential schools across Canada (TRC, 2015). In some cases, the children in IRS were used in nutrition experiments determining the importance of specific minerals, nutrients, and supplements (Mosby, 2013; Mosby & Galloway, 2017). During these studies, children were continually fed nutritionally inadequate diets, sometimes for up to five years (Coté, 2016). While IRS are no longer operational, many youths from northern Ontario First Nations are required to leave their communities and stay with billeted families hundreds of kilometres away in Thunder Bay and Sioux Lookout to attend high school. This creates enormous disruptions to the youths' ability to be mentored by experienced harvesters in their communities.

Engagement in the wage labour economy limits the time available to hunt, harvest, process, distribute, and teach youth about traditional foods (Morrison, 2011; Streit & Mason, 2017). At the same time, one needs to be involved in the wage labour economy in order to afford the high costs of hunting, including equipment and fuel to travel further distances in search of food sources, whose migratory patterns have changed drastically due to climate change (Golden et al., 2015). Income is also necessary in order to afford the exorbitant costs of market food, often only available through the Northern Store (owned by the Northwest Company). Burnett and Hay (2023) outline the Northwest Company and Northern Store's corporate strategies that work to sustain food insecurity in the north.

Yet, traditional food access is often as much or more expensive than market food (Golden et al., 2015; Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2019; Robidoux et al., 2021). While many programs and research grants do provide funding for local food harvesting, Robidoux et al. (2021) demonstrate that, in one northern Ontario community, the actual impact local food harvesting has on food security (in terms of amount of calories from protein) is minimal. This, of course, is in a political and ecological landscape where food resources are continuously *made* scarce due to ongoing resource exploitation and climate change. It is a positive feedback loop of decreasing food availability—when food becomes scarce and hunting becomes more expensive, there are fewer hunters able to be on the land. When there are fewer hunters on the land, it is easier for the province to extract resources unencumbered and unchallenged, further diminishing the abundance of plants and animals integral to sustaining the food system.

These extractions have had profound ecological and social impacts. The pulp and paper Mill in Dryden, Ontario has dumped mercury into the waters, which has bioaccumulated in fish (Long, 2010, p. 160). Hydro-electric dams in northern Ontario and river diversions constructed in order to increase electricity output in the south have flooded out lakes and communities, forcing relocations (Kamal et al., 2015; Long, 2010), destroying manoomin beds (Mehltretter et al., 2020), releasing mercury into the food system (Calder et al., 2016), and disrupting commercial fisheries along with spawning and migratory patterns (Kamal et al., 2015). Forestry and mining developments, accompanied by the construction of access roads, disrupt caribou populations in the region by increasing habitat for alternate prey and increasing predator access (Abraham & Thompson, 1998; Boan et al., 2018). While these changes have led to "increased prosperity for Canadians generally, Anishinaabe lifestyles [have] suffered" (Mehltretter et al., 2020). Essentially, First Nations in Treaty 9 are able to "hunt and fish as they always have" (James Bay Treaty (Treaty 9), 1905) on whatever land is left over after the province takes what it needs for economic development. For example, Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR, 2005) states:

> In general, Aboriginal people exercising their Aboriginal and treaty rights on Crown land are free to do so and enforcement will not occur…enforcement activity is only undertaken where the activity appears to present a significant risk to ecological or resources sustainability, or where there are other compelling and competing land management program goals. (p. 21)

While the MNR rhetoric seemingly supports Treaty rights, they simultaneously explicitly re-establish the province's jurisdictional control—First Nations can use the land as long as it does not interfere with the interests of the province. Alfred (2005) appropriately asks "…to what extent does that state-regulated 'right' to fish represent justice when you consider that Indigenous people have been fishing on their rivers and seas since time began?" (p. 43). Corntassel & Bryce (2012) remind us that "rights are state constructions that do not necessarily reflect inherent Indigenous responsibilities to their homelands. Rather, rights are conditional in that the state can withdraw them at any time or selectively enforce them" (p.152). In line with this critique, Ontario justifies their enforcement and withdrawal of harvesting rights when necessary to maintain "ecological sustainability", yet they are extremely vague about what other "competing land management program goals" might be (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005, p. 21).

King (2011) exposes the ways that conservation is used to justify colonial legislation and control over Indigenous peoples' livelihoods, particularly related to food harvesting. The Supreme Court "has demonstrated that it will continually assert the right and responsibility of the Crown to manage and regulate the harvest" (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005, p. 35). For example, *R. v. Jones and Nadjiwon* (1993) (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005), *Platinex vs. Kitenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug* (2007) (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011), and *Grassy Narrows v. Ontario* (2005) (Townshend LLP, 2014) all resulted in rulings that affirm Ontario's authority over natural resources in the region, bestowed upon the province by the Crown during Treaty proceedings. More recently, Chapleau First Nation, Missanaibi First Nation, and Brunswick House First Nation are pursuing legal action against the ways that the province of Ontario's forestry operations continue to disrupt Indigenous food systems and livelihoods (CBC News, 2022).

Following *Platinex vs. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inniniwug*, Ontario implemented the *Far North Act* (2010). Although publicly presented as heralding a new relationship with First Nations (Government of Ontario, 2021), analysis of the Act reveals that it is merely a repackaging of the same relations which further entrench Ontario's right to take up land as it needs for resource extraction (Gardner et al., 2012; Scott & Cutfeet, 2019). In 2021, Ontario's Progressive Conservative Party passed an amendment to this Act with the intention to remove the "red tape" in the Ring of Fire mining operations in northern Ontario (Scott et al., 2020; Scott & Cutfeet, 2019). Although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that Indigenous people have the right to control and develop their own lands, (UNDRIP, 2007), clearly the kind of partnership or sovereignty necessary to work towards Indigenous food sovereignty in a settler-colonial nation is forcefully limited, as "traditional harvesters who assert their inherent jurisdiction through direct action often face civil and criminal charges in a court system that is adversarial in nature and has demonstrated culturally biased tendency to make judgements in favour of corporate interests" (Morrison, 2011, p. 107).

Amidst these colonial impositions on Indigenous lands, an ecological climate emergency is further stressing traditional food systems. Much research demonstrates the connections between climate change, food security, and food sovereignty in northern Canada (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Golden et al., 2015; Lemelin et al., 2010; Ross & Mason, 2020; Tsuji et al., 2019). In the boreal forest, shifts in water levels (Winterhalder, 1983b), snow depth (Winterhalder, 1983a), and the timing between ice formation and initial snowfall accumulation (Steegman Jr., 1983a) can shift migration patterns and increase the safety risks associated with hunting. While climate change is posing real challenges for traditional food systems in northern Ontario and must be addressed, it has the potential to be used as a political scapegoat in order to obscure the colonial social, economic, and political impositions which created and continue to perpetuate food shortages in First Nations communities. While it may be inherent that political sovereignty is a mandatory precursor of food sovereignty, it must also be consciously and explicitly put at the forefront of the movements, lest Indigenous food sovereignty becomes relegated to exercising Treaty and constitutional rights within a container which is continually being suffocated. Sustaining what we can with what we have can easily slip into a performance of food sovereignty.

Futurity of Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9

As has been outlined in the first two sections, food sovereignty in Treaty 9 is highly contingent on the food resources available, the relative robustness of the ecosystem, a community's capacity and autonomy to adapt, and the ability of the community to negotiate the use of these resources with other communities. The settler colonial state of Canada has disrupted all of these autonomies. This section asks: given these historical and ongoing impositions on Indigenous lifeways, what is the pathway forward for research, partnership, and innovation towards Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9 region of northern Ontario?

There is always a risk in transplanting concepts developed in one context and language to another, especially when Indigenous communities and groups use non-Indigenous terms to define our movements. Indigenous eco-philosophies sharply contrast Eurocentric hierarchical binaries of modernity (Morrison, 2011). The implications of coercion and domination inherent in the term "sovereignty" defies "kin-centric ecology", which entails "an awareness that life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin" (Salmón, 2000, p. 1332) and "foster[s] relationships with plants, animals, and land based on respect and reciprocity" (Coté, 2016, p. 8). In this view, even though life in the bush is hard, it is also "*pimachiowin aki*—'the land that gives life'" (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020, p. 58), based on a "dynamic view of the land and food system, which assumes that nature cannot be controlled nor yields predicted" (Morrison, 2011, p. 104). In an Indigenous, decolonial worldview, the animal and/or plant that is consumed for food has agency, or sovereignty, over themselves. There is an element of needing to "dethink the concept of sovereignty and replace it with a notion of power that has at its root a more appropriate premise" (Alfred, 2005, p. 47). It is not sovereignty *over* food, but sovereignty *of* and *through* food. As activists, academics, and traditional food harvesters protect the sovereignty of the land itself, we protect our own political sovereignty.

While Indigenous food sovereignty and local food harvesting are opportunities for decolonization (Kamal et al., 2015), we must be conscious not to accept them only as metaphors (Tuck & Yang, 2011). While it may look like sovereignty when people hunt and fish traditionally, and it feels like sovereignty when I harvest and reseed manoomin, if the land is still in the control of the state, can we call it such? Barker (2005) explains:

> [Some Indigenous scholars] find the links between sovereignty and particular cultural practices, such as certain aspects of basket weaving or food preparation, to flatten out, distort, or even make light of the legal importance and political substance of sovereignty. (p. 21)

Reclaiming Indigenous homelands, and by extension food sovereignty, requires that all activities that "encroach on the sovereignty of these territories", including mining, damming, and dumping toxins, must cease (Menser, 2014, p. 70), that is, if this is in line with communities' interests.

There is nuance in this perspective, as many communities do see economic potential in mining and other extractive industries. However, Horowitz et al. (2018) found that economic benefits from mining often leak out of Indigenous communities who live in the ecological "sacrifice zones" (p. 407), along with the acute and long-term ecological impacts. These impacts shift, however, when there is greater local ownership. Yet community consultation processes do not include veto power—instead, it is the power to negotiate within a predetermined outcome. Horowitz et al. (2018) succinctly summarize:

> Indeed, Indigenous communities may ultimately see no alternative but to negotiate with companies. As their land rights are restricted to a certain area, often imbued with great cultural, spiritual, and emotional significance to them, they do not have the option to go elsewhere. When it becomes apparent that the project will not go away, they may face a choice between continuing to resist in vain, at great cost and risk to themselves, or negotiating at least some benefits for their communities. (p. 411)

At the same time, employment from industry has been shown to both increase land-harvesting due to increased income to afford to be on the land, and to decrease land-harvesting activities due to limited time available to be on the land (Horowitz et al., 2018).

There are examples of hunter support programs which have found some success in offering an economic return for traditional food harvesting activities (Gombay, 2005, 2009; Government of Canada, 2022). For example, initiatives such as Nutrition North Canada's (NNC) Harvesters Support Grant provide financial support for traditional food harvesting. While this initiative claims to "improve conditions for food sovereignty within northern communities" (Government of Canada, 2022) and does align with the majority of the pillars of food sovereignty, it neglects to mention Indigenous land restitution. It is unsurprising that this piece is avoided, as land is the basis of settler-colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012)— acknowledging that it has been home to political communities long before colonial settlement elicits fear that "the home [settlers] live in and even [their] claim to call this country home are baseless" (Mills, 2017, p. 219). Keske (2021) argues that "Nyéléni Declaration and La Vía Campesina imply, but fall short of, explicitly advocating for local control and resource ownership" (p.4). Yet I would argue instead that this is the central argument of LVC—indeed, at the Nyéléni conference in 2007, a member states, "food sovereignty is only possible if it takes place at the same time as political sovereignty of peoples" (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007, p. 16). However, this element has been lost as the concept has been enthusiastically co-opted by settler-colonial states—as to recognize the central tenet of food sovereignty is to deny the colonial state's legitimacy.

In a socio-ecological context where local food production is unlikely to meet the caloric requirements needed to sustain a community alone (Robidoux et al., 2021), and where there are competitive advantages in climate, technological advancements, and transportation to growing food in more temperate climates and transporting it north (Keske, 2021, p. 4), what does moving towards food sovereignty in Treaty 9 look like? It has been argued that current efforts to train young hunters and foragers to be on the land and supporting families to continue harvesting activities (Turner, 2022) do work towards food sovereignty in a way that has little to do with the amount of food that is brought back (Bagelman, 2018; Bagelman et al., 2016) or whether or not there is state-recognized Indigenous sovereignty to the land that is hunted. For example, Batchewana First Nation is reclaiming their traditional fishery and rejecting provincial jurisdiction by setting up their own fishing authority that does not depend on validation from the colonial state (Lowitt et al., 2019). Communities across northern Ontario have long resisted colonial impositions on food systems, such as Moose Cree First Nation challenging the Migratory Birds Act (Long, 2010) and the aforementioned court challenges to poor mining and forestry consultation and industrial toxin introduction accountability.

More recently, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) have been celebrated as examples of Indigenous co-management of traditional lands. These designations are defined as "lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems" (The Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018, p. 5). The government plans to spend $800 million to support almost one million square kilometres under Indigenous protection and conservation by 2030 (Zimonjic, 2022). Although IPCAs differ across regions, they are argued to be Indigenous-led, represent a long-term commitment to conservation, and elevate Indigenous rights and responsibilities (The Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018). Currently, funding is slated to protect the Hudson Bay and James Bay Lowlands, led by the Omushkego Cree (Zimonjic, 2022). Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation has also submitted a proposal to protect the Fawn River Watershed under their knowledge and authority (McIntosh, 2022). Although provinces tend to be resistant to IPCAs because of the constraints on resource extraction, the federal government has approved many across the country (Mason et al., 2022). Ontario, for example, has expressed resistance to IPCAs (McIntosh, 2022). This makes sense considering their focus on mining activities in Hudson Bay and James Bay watershed—this watershed is fed by multiple rivers, some of which are at risk of being impacted by the Ring of Fire (Stevenson, 2022). However, there are several questions that challenge whether IPCAs truly represent a shift in colonial land management. First, if the IPCA does not protect the entire watershed and cannot control upstream impacts, how will it work to protect the region? Second, IPCA approvals still require government sign-offs (as the land is still considered to be in the hands of the "Crown") that are not guaranteed. While it is an important step towards Indigenous land management and co-management, it is neither land restitution nor exclusive sovereignty (Wood, 2022). While regaining Indigenous title is possible through lengthy and expensive court negotiations and communities have demonstrated that they are willing to go through with this process, again, it requires immense amounts of time and energy.

Alternatively, Batchewana First Nation (and others) provide an example of reclaiming land sovereignty without waiting for Canada's approval of their jurisdiction. While Batchewana's rejection of colonial authority is an important step towards Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, and "de-linking" (Mignolo, 2007), at the same time, broader decisions about Lake Superior (e.g., shipping rates and regulations, invasive species legislation) are still held by the Federal Government of Canada, and those pressures have great impacts on the stability and sustainability of the fishery. While choosing to ignore government-set fishing limits in the lake is one measure of political sovereignty, without Indigenous land restitution, decisions about what happens to and on that lake still rest in the hands of the settler-colonial state. In the beginning of this section, I asked what the pathway forward is for Indigenous food sovereignty in northern Ontario. Based on the research in this paper, it is clear that communities will always do what is in their power to protect land and water sovereignty and integrity. Yet if we do not place Indigenous land restitution, resurgence, and sovereignty, however defined by the community, at the heart of our work, we risk sidestepping the foundation of Indigenous food sovereignty—the Land.

Conclusions

Colonial social, economic, cultural, ecological, and political impositions in the boreal forests of northern Ontario have created scarcities in traditional food systems that have led to food insecurity. If food sovereignty does not work in concert with land restitution efforts such as Land Back, it will be exercised in exponentially shrinking and segregated parcels of state-controlled land, which is becoming increasingly unpredictable due to climatic abnormalities. This is not to say that because of these imposed limits the pursuit of Indigenous food sovereignty is in vain; rather, it is *through* food that Indigenous land, political, and knowledge sovereignty has been and continues to be realized. Yerxa (2014) writes about the way her community asserts their presence and governance on the land without requiring state approval. In other contexts, presence on one's land involves conflict, such as the KI Six resisting mining in Treaty 9 (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011) and Black Duck Wild Rice seeding manoomin in the Kawarthas (Hayden Taylor, 2020). Sustaining the defense of the land in this way requires massive physical, emotional, intellectual, and financial sacrifice from Indigenous communities, minds, hearts, and bodies, which have already had many of these resources strained.

If we do not challenge this misplaced use of food sovereignty in a settler-colonial society, we create a narrative that has a built-in justification for increased government intervention to create economic opportunities and to provide market-based solutions to food shortages. It also justifies state surveillance to monitor wildlife and harvesting rates. Scarce food resources justify conservation and management policies, a complete opposite to, for example, Anishinaabeg teachings where:

> the plant is not simply a resource to be managed but rather an active and agential partner for whose future generations one cares and is responsible. Whereas conservation is a form of management applied to other life forms by humans without their consent, in this interaction, the plant must give consent and can always refuse it.... (Mitchell, 2020, p. 916)

It is within this context that I am reminded of harvesting and reseeding manoomin. Using our hands and participating in these harvesting activities has been argued to help re-establish kin-centric relationships to the entire ecosystem (Kamal et al., 2015; Morrison, 2020), reconnect with food and political systems (Martens et al., 2016), and "inherently asserts Indigenous peoples' self-determination of their own culturally suitable food systems" (Settee & Shukla, 2020, p. 4). This aligns with Corntassel and Bryce's (2012) emphasis on "moving away from the performativity of a rights discourse geared toward state affirmation and approval toward a daily existence conditioned by place-based cultural practices" (p. 153). While I believe and feel all of these elements when I am harvesting and seeding manoomin in my grandfather's community in southern Ontario, I understand that ultimate control over the lake remains in the hands of the settler-colonial state, which still has the ability, through legislative and indeed military power, to shape the space within which Indigenous food sovereignty is practiced. How can Indigenous food sovereignty exist in this context? As long as we keep our rice bed contained, there is no problem. When we start to expand, we meet resistance. While the costs of pushing against that container are great, so too are the costs of choosing not to.

From an Anishinaabe perspective, there is nothing new or radical about the concept of sovereignty *of* and *through* food. In the seven fire prophecies, the Anishinaabe are instructed to move west "to a land where food grows on water" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 89). I think about the profundity and depth of this relationship as I harvest and seed manoomin. I am reminded that, during the harvest, much more seed is knocked off into the lake than lands in our canoe. This means the more we harvest, the more the rice beds grow. The more these rice beds grow, the more they push on settler-colonial impositions which attempt to limit their growth. This perimeter serves as a revelation of both the impositions on it and the opportunities for growth and restoration. Without enacting this agency of and through food, the settler colonial state can continue to encroach on the land unencumbered. Instead of accepting this, by practicing traditional harvesting, manoomin and the Anishinaabe (and many other Indigenous communities and food systems) are seeding and leading each other.

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Original Research Article

Negotiating farm femininity in agricultural leadership

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Abstract

A growing number of women in the Canadian Prairie region are advancing into leadership roles in agriculture, which remains a predominantly male domain. In this research we explore how professionally and managerially employed women in agriculture in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta navigate being a leader in an industry characterized by rural hegemonic masculinity. We explore and examine the personal experiences and observations of these women regarding gender, leadership, and the current state of prairie agriculture as it grapples with being more inclusive, diverse, and equitable. We found that to gain legitimacy as a leader in agriculture women are enacting a complex mix of traditional femininity, anti-affirmative action, and masculine-coded farm credibility. Women are required to be both like a man and like a woman to differentiate themselves—both from men and from one another—as they navigate both similarity and difference in their gender performance. Expanding on the work of Mavin and Grandy's (2016) work on respectable business femininity, we have conceptualized this performance as "respectable farm femininity" to reflect the specific experiences, and previously unexplored domain of women in agricultural leadership (outside of the on-farm contexts that make up the scholarship in this area). These expectations are rooted in more traditional constructions of rural, hegemonic masculinity, but carry important weight in conferring legitimacy to women in agricultural leadership. This has important implications for how women are able to carve out their career path on the way to leadership.

Keywords: Women in leadership; agriculture; Canadian Prairie Region; respectable farm femininity; privilege

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Résumé

Un nombre croissant de femmes de la région des Prairies canadiennes accèdent à des postes de direction dans l'agriculture, qui reste un domaine à prédominance masculine. Dans cette recherche, nous explorons comment les femmes employées comme professionnelles et comme gestionnaires dans l'agriculture dans les provinces du Manitoba, de la Saskatchewan et de l'Alberta naviguent en tant que leader dans une industrie caractérisée par une masculinité rurale hégémonique. Nous explorons et examinons les expériences personnelles et les observations de ces femmes concernant le genre, le leadership et l'état actuel de l'agriculture des Prairies qui compose avec la nécessité d'être plus inclusive, diversifiée et équitable. Nous avons constaté que pour gagner en légitimité en tant que leader dans l'agriculture, les femmes mettent en œuvre un mélange complexe de féminité traditionnelle, d'actions anti-affirmatives et d'actes de crédibilité agricole dont les codes sont masculins. On attend des femmes qu'elles soient à la fois comme un homme et comme une femme pour se différencier – des hommes autant que les unes des autres –, alors qu'elles naviguent à la fois dans la similitude et la différence dans leur performance de genre. En développant le travail de Mavin et Grandy (2016) sur la féminité commerciale respectable, nous avons conceptualisé cette performance comme étant la « féminité agricole respectable » pour refléter les expériences spécifiques et le domaine auparavant inexploré des femmes dans le leadership agricole (en dehors des contextes d'exploitation agricole directe qui font l'objet des études dans ce domaine). Ces attentes sont enracinées dans des constructions plus traditionnelles de la masculinité rurale hégémonique, mais ont un poids important lorsqu'il s'agit de conférer une légitimité aux femmes dans le leadership agricole. Cela a des conséquences importantes sur la manière dont celles-ci parviennent à se tailler une place dans une carrière de leader.

Introduction

The social, cultural, and economic landscape of agriculture[1] in Canada's Prairie Region has changed substantially in the last hundred years, and with that so have the roles, contributions, and expectations of women involved in its various dimensions. Women are now outnumbering men in agriculture college classrooms (Gilmour, 2014), and they are increasing in numbers as farm owner/operators and in agriculture business and government positions (Statistics Canada, 2016). For example, in 2001, women made up about 28 percent of all Alberta farmers, but in 2021 over 32 percent of Alberta farmers were women (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Despite these initiatives and advancements for women, the struggle for equality and representation

[1] We use the term "agriculture" in the Canadian Prairie context, where a "productivist agriculture" paradigm reflects a contemporary, conventional, capitalist approach that is characterized by: (1) increasing production and efficiency through intensive and increased use of mechanization, inputs, and technology; (2) increasing scale and specialization of production, leading to increasing concentration of capital and resources; and, (3) decreasing number of farms and declining rural communities (Trauger, 2001).

continues,[2] and the industry remains male dominated: women are still underrepresented in senior management positions in government, private businesses, industry associations, and educational institutions. The patriarchal legacy[3] of unequal gender relations (and corresponding gender ideologies) that contributed to women's historical subordinate position on the farm continues to maintain a grip on the ideologies, discourses, and practices within the broader scope of prairie agriculture in Canada (Kubik & Moore, 2001; Wiebe, 1996).

The focus of this research is on women in agricultural leadership positions in the Canadian Prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and their experiences navigating complicated gendered milieus during the evolution of their professional careers. Departing from previous feminist rural sociological scholarship that focusses on on-farm gender relations, we contend that the professional agriculture sector presents a particular set of challenges to women in leadership (Alston, 2000; Coldwell, 2007; Fletcher, 2015; Fletcher & Kubik, 2016; Heather et al., 2005). Expanding on the theoretical framework of "respectable business femininity" proposed by Mavin and Grandy (2016) we argue that women's organizational privilege as leaders in the agriculture industry is either strengthened or weakened through the demonstration of masculine farm credibility *and* performances of respectable femininity. We suggest that "masculine farm credibility" can best be understood as the currency with which women prove (to their male counterparts) their credibility or merit in agricultural spaces by having on-farm knowledge or experience that is traditionally associated with men. We propose the concept of "respectable farm femininity" to analyze and explain the particular experiences that arise as a result of being both a woman and leader in agriculture. This conceptual framework helps explain agricultural women leaders' struggles and navigational strategies in their quests to be evaluated as credible and respectable as they work to emulate both similarity and difference in their gender presentation. Our work takes existing rural sociological scholarship on the performative gender work of women in agriculture and provides a conceptual framework of respectable farm femininity to account for the ways in which organizational privilege operates in this milieu. We fuse scholarship on gender and leadership together with rural sociological research to craft an understanding of the path to leadership for women in agriculture in the Canadian prairie provinces.

Being a woman and a leader in agriculture often requires a particular gender performance that encompasses both masculine and feminine self-presentation. We found that women in leadership place significant emphasis on looking and acting the feminine part, while also working in other ways to secure their role as highly regarded, dignified, reputable, and well thought-of leaders. As we demonstrate, women experience pressures to conform to notions of respectable femininity through their body and behaviour to retain privilege as a credible woman leader while simultaneously drawing on their masculine farm credibility to ensure they are taken seriously as leaders and have "earned" their right to be in the elite leadership

[2] See for example the four-part *Western Producer* series on Women in Agriculture (Fries, 2017).
[3] The patriarchal legacy specific to agriculture in the Canadian Prairies includes both the legal, political, and social processes that contributed to the subordination of women. The ideologies that permeate on-farm gender relations are well researched within the rural sociological literature in Canada and elsewhere, but broadly include the disproportionate division of household and domestic labour as the responsibility of women (including both domestic, on-farm, and off-farm labour), the absence of participation in agri-political organizations and events, as well as the entrenchment of traditional gender roles and hierarchies (Carter, 2016; Kubik & Moore, 2001).

positions they occupy. A particularly novel observation we encountered is that women feel compelled to differentiate themselves from *other* women in a male-dominated space by speaking out against "gender quotas," "diversity calculations" with an "anti-affirmative action" type rhetoric. This is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the ways in which women in agriculture are reflecting larger socio-cultural milieus of anti-feminist backlash (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017; Hochschild, 2016), while at the same time trying to publicly account for the scarcity of women in leadership in their sector. This observation is previously undiscussed in the rural sociological literature because of its relatively recent emergence in the current socio-political context.

This research comes at a time when women (and other under-represented groups) in leadership has become a popular and debated topic within many agriculture circles in Canada. Arguably this discussion and debate is not just occurring in the agriculture sector, but across most sectors and organizations (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2022). Broadly speaking, we argue that this research addresses the larger call to render visible the covert and often-invisible factors which undermine women's capacities to aspire to and achieve success in high level leadership roles. Globally, we are facing a myriad of wicked problems related to food production and its environmental and social sustainability, exacerbated by a changing climate and deep political division about the way forward. Difficult and complex problems such as these require an "all hands-on deck" approach that values diverse voices at leadership tables including more women and other underrepresented social groups. The experiences and perspectives presented in this paper highlight the labyrinthine-like path (Eagly, 2020) women traverse on their way to leadership in the Canadian agricultural sector. By spotlighting these experiences, we continue to insist that more thoughtful work needs to be done to understand women's experiences and by extension increase women's participation in agricultural leadership.

Literature review

Women leaders[4] sometimes find themselves in a dynamic interplay of having organizational power, whilst simultaneously being marginalized in social relations (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014; Haynes, 2012; Mavin & Grandy 2016). Within their professional milieu, they are granted organizational privilege through their elite position and formal title, however, this experience of privilege is sometimes mediated by gender and other social axes of identity such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Berry & Bell, 2012; Leonard, 2010; Mavin & Grandy, 2016). According to the Canadian Women's Foundation (2022) about 35 percent of management occupations and 30 percent of senior management level occupations are held by women; however, women of colour only hold 6.2 percent of board, executive, and senior management positions collectively with Black, Indigenous, women with disabilities, and LGBTQ2AS+ women each

[4] The conceptual framing and subsequent analysis of women in leadership relies on the assumption of a gender binary and we acknowledge that limitation in our work. In the Canadian agriculture sector, the assumption of gender binaries is ubiquitous and apparent. Gender identity or expression was never mentioned in any of our interviews, or any form of oppression related to it therein. There is no scholarship to date on the experiences of non-traditional gender identity expression in the Canadian agriculture sector. As mentioned previously, our sample population was relatively homogeneous.

holding less than 1 percent of women-held senior leadership and pipeline positions, respectively. Atewologun and Sealy (2014) offer an elaborated conceptualization of organizational privilege and propose three dimensions: contested, conferred, and contextual. Directly following their approach, we consider women leaders in agriculture as a "sometimes privileged" minority in organizations where they face tensions and contradictions as leaders.

Many of these tensions and contradictions occur because women leaders operate within professional environments where institutionalized sexism and racism underpins gendered relations (Gherardi & Poggio, 2007; Walby, 1989). To be taken seriously, women leaders face double binds and are expected to perform femininities associated with being a (white) woman whilst also demonstrating masculinities expected of those leadership positions (Brandth,1995; Eagly, 2020; Pini, 2005). Thus, women leaders can find themselves doing gender well (femininity) and differently (masculinity) simultaneously against sex-category (Haynes, 2012; Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Shilling, 2008).

As gender scholars have demonstrated, gender, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and contextual; they change over time and have dynamic and varied manifestations (Kimmel & Holler, 2016). What is understood as "acceptable" femininity may be judged differently based on other social identity markers like race, class, or sexual orientation (Chow, 1999; Krane et al., 2004).[5] Worldwide, people expect women to be the more "communal" sex (warm, supportive, amicable) and men to be the more "agentic" sex (assertive, dominant, authoritative) and these gender stereotypes have not disappeared despite women's roles having changed (Eagly, 2020). Constructions of femininity around the body and emotions, and of masculinity around disembodiment and rationality, perpetually reinforce leadership as the domain of men and masculinity, where men are institutionalized as "natural" leaders and "ideal workers" while women are viewed as other (Acker, 1990; Pullen & Taska, 2017). As a result, women leaders have been defined and understood vis-à-vis their bodies (Haynes, 2012), reproductive capacities (Gatrell, 2011), and shaped by expectations of what is perceived to be respectable for their gender (Sinclair, 2011; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Mavin and Grandy (2016) propose that twenty-first century constructions of respectable femininity are worked out on and through women's bodies, specifically through socially respectable bodies and appearance, a phenomenon they call "respectable business femininity." Respectable business femininity is the nexus of the struggles and tensions through a disciplining of women's bodies and appearance in the elite leader role. Scholarship on respectable femininity also includes women who are marginalized based on race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality in non-Western settings (Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2009).

Being a woman in an agricultural leadership position requires a particular gender performance that encompasses both masculine and feminine presentation (Alston, 2000; Liepens, 1998; Pini, 2005). This outward performance, as a member of what has been called the "third sex" (Pini, 2005), is multifarious and obscure. It requires a synchronous performance of both masculinity and femininity. On one hand, it requires women to be objective, rational, desexualized, and unencumbered by domestic duties, while on the other hand, they must present themselves as not completely

[5] For the purposes of this research, "acceptable femininity" was a rather homogenous category, as all the interview participants were highly educated, European-Canadian, middle-class women, shaped primarily by the socio-cultural ideologies and practices of rurality in the Canadian Prairies.

bereft of softness, sexual attractiveness, and cordiality (Pini, 2005). In other areas of leadership, women manage these expectations by displaying an amalgam of agentic and communal qualities, conveying their likeability by demonstrating interpersonal warmth alongside other agentic characteristics (Eagly, 2020).

As gender scholars have long argued, the categories of masculinity are not fixed and are historically, socially, regionally, and culturally specific (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While recognizing there are a plurality of masculinities that vary across contexts, there are still arguably hegemonic ways of doing gender; scholarship on the gendered character of bureaucracies and workplaces has demonstrated the ways in which hegemonic masculinity has been institutionalized (Cheng, 1996). Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity, particularly in Western organizational contexts, mobilizes around physical strength, emotional neutrality, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity, and rationality (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). Both in definition and in practice, leadership is intricately connected to the construction and enactment of hegemonic masculinity (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Knutilla, 2016; Sinclair, 1998). This enactment of hegemonic masculinity finds resonance in the literature on managerial masculinities (Halberstam, 2011; Pini, 2005). Despite changing discourses in management and leadership, hegemonic masculinity retains its grip on how these discourses are conceived and deployed. The measure of a good leader is determined by the extent of control, competition, reason, efficiency, independence, and other agentic qualities exhibited, and these characteristics are most frequently associated with men (Eagly, 2020; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sinclair, 1998). The degree of preference for these leadership qualities is also dependent on the political and ideological context, and some scholars note the slight shift toward androgyny in the leadership stereotype (Koenig et al., 2011), although this is not the norm.

A good leader in the agriculture arena is perceived as one who is strong, determined, aggressive, risk-taking, and knowledgeable (Alston, 2000; Liepens, 1998; Pini, 2005). The tough and powerful masculinities embedded in on-farm constructions of agriculture replicate and overlap with the construction of masculinities in other agri-political domains. Those operating in the public and professional world of agriculture draw credibility by aligning themselves with on-farm notions of masculinity. The agricultural professional, for example, may be photographed next to farm machinery or in work clothes rather than a business suit (Brandth, 1995; Pini, 2005). But with the increasing industrialization and globalization of agriculture, agribusiness is transforming the masculine identity of the "the farmer" from that of the plaid-wearing, tough, and rugged individual to the professionalized "agribusiness man." This new portrayal of farming masculinity emphasizes reliance upon manufactured and high-tech inputs together with expertise of agribusiness sutured together with "conventional masculinity" (Bell et al., 2015).

Gender scholars have also noted the ways in which iconic understanding of "the farmer" is rooted not only in a gendered binary, racialized power, but that it is also heteronormative. The farmer, as traditionally understood, is the "ideal worker" completely committed to his employment, constructed as a hegemonic "manly" man whose singular hard work and conquest of nature, undertaken with a drive of competitive individualism, contributes to the subordinate positioning of women and the feminine "other" (Campbell et al., 2006; Leslie, 2017). Symbolic codes embedded within these cultural narratives are depicted as binary or opposites (Bell et. al., 2015). Alternative agriculture, for example, that prioritizes smaller-scale farms, environmental and social sustainability, is feminized and portrayed as "other," running up against, or opposite to, the traditional, or "true" approach to agriculture (Trauger et al., 2010).

Meta-analyses of Australian publications focussed on rural and agriculture studies reveals that the field of rural sociology has generally been silent on the question of racial and class inequalities (Pini e al., 2021). While feminist scholars have interrogated the figure of the "white, middle-class, property-owning, settler male farmer" and introduced questions of gender in rural research, by and large, these studies have been silent on issues of race and class. As new conceptions of "the farmer" are gradually becoming untethered from men and masculinity, it remains a subject position implicitly tied to whiteness and class privilege and "conflated with the identity of rural woman" (Pini et al., 2021, p. 254). In Canada, only 4 percent of the farm population are part of a racialized group (Statistics Canada, 2023) and there is no race disaggregated data for women in leadership within the agriculture sector in Canada. The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC, 2023) recognizes the need for more participation from underrepresented groups (women, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, people with disabilities) within the agricultural sector more broadly and these conversations are ongoing.

These dominant narratives of conventional, white masculinity support unequal economic and power relations, since the articulation of these narratives of masculinity enables the circulation and naturalization of "truths" and "knowledges" about what it means to work in agriculture. It is in and through the articulation of these sets of meanings that dominant patterns of farming and agricultural politics are shaped and re-shaped (Alston, 2000; Alston et al., 2018; Liepens, 1998; Pini et al., 2021). Feminist rural sociologists have established that women farmers are often expected to enact tenets of hegemonic masculinity but are also expected to remain sufficiently feminine (Alston, 2000; Liepens, 1998; Pini, 2005). As we will demonstrate, the prevailing masculinities embedded in on-farm configurations of agriculture also permeate the constructions of agriculture in high-level professional agricultural workspaces, particularly through the expectation of masculine farm credibility.

An emerging facet of this gender performance is the "anti-affirmative action" sentiment prevalent in the agriculture sector. This is consistent with broader postfeminist discourses that assert feminism (and collective feminist action) is something that is "no longer needed," that "women can do without" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 8). Rather, as good neoliberal subjects, women understand themselves as wholly responsible for their own self-governance, success, and failure. As such, promotions and advancement should be based solely on merit because practices like "gender quotas" and "diversity calculations" are perceived as unnecessary and, in some cases, harmful to the organization. Consistent with individualist feminism of neoliberal consumer culture (Banet-Wiser & Portland-Stacer, 2017), gender inequalities are acknowledged by women in agriculture leadership, but the social, cultural, organizational, and economic structures that perpetuate such inequalities are overlooked in favour of individualized accounts and solutions.[6]

Methods

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with forty women from within provincial government, academia, industry, and non-profit organizations. Interviewees were recruited through both purposive and snowball sampling methods. Interview participants were not asked to self-identify their ethno-cultural, immigration or racial background. However, based on appearance and interview content, all participants in this study were white or white passing. Table 1 provides socio-demographic information on participants' age, geographic location, and highest level of education.

Table 1: Age, education, geographic location, and sector of research participants

Participant Characteristics	% of participants
Age	
18-24	0
25-34	14
45-54	17
55-64	35
65-74	21
75+	0
Highest Level of Education	
High school or equivalent	0
Some college but no degree	3
Associate degree	7

[6] This research also comes amidst a time of political instability and change, wherein "an aggressive backlash against…feminism in media culture," a rise of "alt-right" (Wood & Litherland, 2018, p. 908) political groups online, and an intensification of misogyny and racism has become ever more acrimonious and far-reaching (Jane, 2014; McRobbie, 2016).

Bachelor's degree	25
Graduate degree	53
College certificate	10
Province of Residence	
Manitoba	21
Saskatchewan	29
Alberta	50
Sector Employed In	
Industry	14
Farmer Owner/Operator	7
Business Owner	7
Education	17
Government	14
Non-profit	25
Other	14

In this research, the term "leader" included women who hold positions of power and influence in their organizational and institutional hierarchies. Research participants in this study hold positions such as: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Executive Director (ED), President, Senior Vice President (SVP), Manager / Senior Manager, Dean, Minister, and Deputy Minister positions within and related to agriculture. Also included were women who have founded their own businesses or non-profit organizations in agriculture (with annual operating budgets over $5 million).

Interviews were conducted over an intensive eight-month time period from September 2016 to April 2017 and guided by an exploratory set of questions on career development, significant professional accomplishments, impact, and influence of being a member of "the third sex" in agriculture, advice, and future opportunities for young women. The questions were intentionally broad and underpinned by the literature discussed above that indicate the deeply embedded patriarchal terrain of agriculture, women's exclusion and professional experiences around navigating gender in agriculture. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using qualitative software (NVivo) wherein a coding framework was developed using a deductive thematic analysis with extant literature. In the beginning stages of the analysis, we employed analytic categories based on the work of other feminist rural sociologists, particularly Alston's (2000) work on women and power in agri-politics, Pini's (2005) work on women as a "third sex" in agriculture, as well the work of Canadian scholars Fletcher and Kubik (2016) regarding the impacts of climate change and rural restructuring. Other areas of analysis included scholarship on the changing dynamics in on-farm gender relations, the history of women in agriculture in Canada (particularly around participation and involvement in farming and national level agriculture policy), and the experience of women in leadership in male dominated professions.

As the research progressed, new and unexpected themes and patterns emerged, so we also employed an inductive thematic analysis stemming from the data itself. Themes around anti-affirmative action, feminist backlash, and the use of similarity and difference as distinguishing features and markers of credibility were significant findings that informed our framework. Another novel finding we examined was the participant's use of motherhood capital (as a gendered performance) to justify and increase legitimacy of conventional food production and consumption, written about elsewhere (Braun et al., 2020). Qualitative research is an iterative and cyclical processes of going between raw data and literature and our work was no exception.

Names and revealing details about the interviewees have been anonymized with each woman assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. As such, we reference the position they hold (e.g., high-level civil servant, owner, president) and the particular sector they represent (e.g., government, industry, commodity group). For example, if a participant was a Chief Financial Officer of a major agricultural corporation the citation would be presented as (CFO, industry).[7]

Findings

In this section we identify and examine the ways in which women leaders both experience and navigate their own professional work environments and appraise their own and other women's masculine farm credibility, in an environment where they are often working to maintain their legitimacy and privilege. The women strive to be perceived as competent and reputable leaders through certain gender management strategies as they enact both similarity to men, and difference from men (and in some cases, differences from other women) in their gender presentation as leaders. In doing so, they confer, contest, and defend privilege. These efforts and displays of credibility reveal how privilege at the intersection of gender and agriculture leadership is tenuous and complex. In what follows we examine and discuss four themes arising

[7] It should be noted that this position/sector delineation is very generic because of the desire to protect the identity of our participants. There are so few women in high level leadership/management positions in Canadian agriculture, it would be quite easy for someone to identify some of these women by their position description alone. Because women shared personal and sensitive information in these interviews, it is of utmost importance to ensure anonymity.

from the first author's data to illustrate the concept of respectable farm femininity.

"You are always obvious": Respectable femininity and being the "Third Sex"

The above quote, from an Academic Dean, succinctly encapsulates the experiences felt by many women in leadership within the agricultural sector. Interviewees were often the only woman or one of the only women in the room in senior leadership meetings, team meetings, negotiations, or professional development events. As illustrated by a past-president of a non-profit organization: "It's been very much a man's world. Everything I've done, it's been me and men." Several women noted, jokingly, that "when you're a woman in agriculture, you rarely have to line up for the washroom" (Senior Researcher, Government).

Gender and organization scholars observe that women in management often engage a range of strategies to "manage gender" (Sheppard, 1989) which require them to redefine and rework masculinity and femininity. Women in this research described engaging in a variety of gender management strategies. One of these strategies focusses on dress. Women's bodies and appearance in organizations make a statement about their acceptability and credibility as leaders. Women spoke about how they chose their professional wardrobes to be conservative: dark blue and black suits, other muted tones, pants or skirts below the knee, and high necklines. Participants' also spoke of the dress advice they gave to young women, cautioning them about what *not* to wear: low cut and/or tight-fitting blouses, bright, attention-grabbing colours, or short skirts; in other words, "don't be a sex pot" (Dean, Academia) or a "floozy" (High level civil servant, Government). This dress code is formulated to conceal women's gender difference and make them less distinguishable, or to make them appear similar to their male counterparts. The masculine work environment is "literally 'written on' the body" (Gimlin, 2007, p. 363).

Many of the younger women interviewed (Millennials[8] / Generation Xers[9]) identified a very clear delineation of what was appropriate to wear in different situations. If you had to make a farm visit, which may include going to the field with a client, it is important that you wear your Wrangler jeans, cowboy boots, and have your hair in a ponytail to display your on-farm savvy (Founder, Non-Profit). But keeping some backup dress clothes and a bit of makeup in your pick-up truck was also advisable. This scenario illustrates the navigation strategies women engage in as members of "the third sex," to be perceived as legitimate in their roles as agricultural leaders and women. It also demonstrates the ways in which women actively work at negotiating their gender presentation.

Another prominent gender management strategy for women was the concerted use of humour to "warm up the room" (Past president, Farmer organization), to deflect and downplay inappropriate sexist comments from men, particularly in professional settings seen in this exchange between a female Senior VP and a male in the industry:

> "Man: If you were my wife, I'd never let you talk that way.
> Senior VP: Well first off, I'd never be your wife."

[8] Millennials is a term used to describe a generational demographic cohort of those born between approximately the mid-1980s to the late-1990s (Anzovino et al., 2019).
[9] Generation X is a term used to describe a generational demographic cohort of those born approximately early to mid-1960s till the mid-1980s (Anzovino et al., 2019).

Respectable business femininity requires that women's demeanour remain soft and cordial and not cross into the terrain of "sour old bitch" (Pini, 2005, p. 235). As one participant articulated, you need to be able to control your "bitch meter" (President, Commodity Organization) and not be too aggressive in how you present yourself and your ideas. In contrast to that observation, however, one woman revealed that she feared being passed up for a big promotion because of her friendly and personable disposition, leading others to think she was incapable of making the "tough decisions" required of the job. On the other hand, some women saw this ability to bring their "feminine qualities" to the table as an advantage, one that distinguished them from the men: "When I started my career around agriculture, I was often the only woman in the room. I always viewed that as an advantage because I looked different, sounded different, thought different, as a result I got to over-leverage my view. I had more leverage than I probably deserved because I was a unique voice" (High level civil servant, Government).

As another woman commented, "that's the thing that happens at board meetings…the generally attractive, well-dressed woman will get a lot of the attention" (President, Commodity Association).

Women also engaged in extensive monitoring and disciplining their social identities and behaviours. Several women recounted when they had to make their on-farm visits earlier in their careers, their first priority was to make friends with and focus on the farmer's wife, to gain her trust. It was generally understood that farmers' wives did not like or trust young professional women who had to interact, sometimes in close quarters, with their husbands. A mother's advice to her daughter was, "never wear something or act in a way that's gonna make somebody's else's wife be uncomfortable, because that's the fastest way to get yourself kicked off the farm and that's the fastest way to lose your credibility as a professional in your job" (Founder, Non-Profit).

Similarly, when women in this study had to travel with their male colleagues for work, or participate in social events outside of work, many were very cognisant of the nature of the jokes and stories they told, how much alcohol they consumed, not being alone with a male colleague, and again, how they dressed, "I am super, super careful about low cut shirts and my underwear hanging out" (Founder, Non Profit). The rigour these women applied to their strategies ranged from not having one drop of alcohol at work-related events (Co-Owner, Farm Business), to drawing the line at going to strip clubs (Senior Leadership, Industry).

These findings demonstrate that women in agriculture, across sub-sectors, are still required to enact a particular gender performance that encompasses both masculine and feminine self-presentation and are still governed by the dictates of respectable femininity within a highly masculine organizational environment. The performance of respectable femininity at the intersection of demonstrated masculine farm credibility determined, in many ways, the conferring or contesting of privilege for women leaders in this study.

Conferring privilege: Hard knocks and blue Ford trucks

Privilege is conferred when women agricultural leaders act within the parameters of respectable femininity, demonstrating their ability to be seen as a woman, while also amplifying certain masculine traits, particularly around their possession of masculine farm credibility. Privilege is dependent on whether women can prove their on-farm experience and their ability to handle the "hard knocks" (Manager, Banking): an essentialized "truth" of farming. Many women spoke of agriculture as an "old boys club" populated by aging white men who put a premium on on-farm knowledge and experience. They mirrored those expectations around masculine farm credibility, too: "The credibility that it takes to become a true leader in agriculture, you've got to have a real solid fundamental aspect of what it takes to get your fingers dirty out there first" (CEO, Business Owner).

There was also this sense that if you only had "book smarts" and not enough practical knowledge, farmers would detect and negatively judge that immediately (CEO, Business). Similarly, another woman notes, "I never did finish my degree, the interesting thing is with my role, experience matters more which is really important" (Senior Manager, Banking). One woman attributed part of her success and solid reputation (privilege) in the industry to her ability to "talk farmer" (Consultant, Industry) because she grew up on a farm. "Talking farmer" was defined as speaking very directly and rationally, clear and to the point, while demonstrating a level of awareness about the industry as a whole.

Masculine farm credibility is also demonstrated through certain kinds of masculine farm apparel, and the ability and willingness to get dirty, "You sit down and talk to a rancher…he doesn't want to see a girl in a skirt [and] high heel shoes show up on his farm…you got to have your boots and jeans on and get ready to get a little shit on your boots. I think we're making changes in how they view their industry and how they view their businesses but it's still dirt in your hands farming" (Senior Leadership, Industry).

In order that privilege be conferred, women, or "girls," need to wear the appropriate clothing in the appropriate context: masculine and rugged dress on the farm, skirt and high heels in the office.

Another way that privilege and credibility was conferred for some women was through their competence and technical know-how in operating large pieces of farm equipment. One woman who co-owned a successful agricultural company, recalled all the things she did in the early days of her career to establish rapport with her bosses and clients; for example, she talked about attempting to drive a piece of farm equipment that she had never set foot in before, because she wanted to be able to say that she had done it (Co-Owner, Business). Nothing about her business or her position within that business had anything to do with her ability to drive farm equipment. Another woman who did not come from a farming background but whose partner farmed notes, "I never did learn how to drive a tractor…although I use the farm background when I was doing presentations and speaking because it gave me that credibility, you know?" (Past President, Non-Profit). This woman went on to say that she would always check with her husband about the status of the farm or how the crops were doing before she went to any meetings or presentations so that she could speak knowledgeably about their farm, even though her work was about the politics of organic certification, and not equipment or the technical specifications of her farm in that moment. Finally, privilege was also perceived to be conferred through the type of vehicle one chose to drive, "I've got the farm cred! I pull up in my big blue [Ford] F-150 and then they bash me for driving a Ford, and then we carry on, right?" (Senior Manager, Banking). Her vehicle was a particular point of pride and a way for her to convey her legitimacy.

One of the most highly regarded and powerful women in Canadian agricultural leadership recounted her connection and experiences on the farm to her position within the industry and her reputation around the corporate leadership table,

> "so, my levelling in my professional career has been my farm…[it] was very tough when I grew

> up, so I had the pain of that and the learning from the hardship of that, to [the large farm] that we've been able to grow quite successfully here. If it hadn't been for that initial hardship, then the [industry] experience, then translated back to [my] farm.... I would not be where I'm at in my career if it hadn't been for that" (Senior Leadership, Industry).

She strongly believes that her privilege was conferred (particularly as an inductee to the "old boys club") as a direct result of her experiences and knowledge of farming, particularly making it through hardships and the singular building of their own family farm via hard work and mental tenacity.

Even when women were already firmly established in their leadership positions, there was a deep awareness of how their position was never to be taken for granted and that it was important to assume nothing, "I think as a woman...and in the bigger political context, what I always had to be conscious of, what I am deeply aware of—I don't come into the room with the credentials already established. Even as a farmer. Even as a farmer among farmers. I don't come in with my credentials already on the table. I usually have to come in, even as the president, I'd have to come in and establish my credentials in one way or another" (Past President, Non-Profit; Founder, International Non-Profit, Farmer).

Privilege among women in agriculture leadership was consistently conferred through the display of masculine farm credibility—from experience, to dress, to equipment, and transportation choices—women felt they needed to boldly enact and exhibit their worthiness by the figurative "dirt" on their hands, demonstrating their ability to be, in some ways, like a man. While many of these women held positions of power via their organizational positioning, it is also evident that their privilege is not always stable and that they continually needed to work on establishing or re-establishing that privilege via their masculine farm credibility, layered on to the negotiation of their respectable femininity. This was consistent across all sectors and professional positions.

Contesting privilege: Being more than a "diversity calculation"

High level positions of privilege were protected by women and that manifested itself through a strong and pervasive anti-affirmative action stance among over half of research participants. "You need to be able to earn your spot. I truly fundamentally believe that" (CEO, Ranch). When asked if she thought there was a need for more women in positions of leadership, one woman commented, "I don't think you need to be in a board position because you're a woman—that's just really not what I believe in. I think if you can do the job well and you're a woman, great! If you're a guy and can do the job well, great" (Co-Owner, Ag Retail). Repeatedly, interviewees spoke of the importance of finding 'the right person for the job' and women not being hired or promoted just because they're women. "I believe you get the job on merit. And...if you don't have the merit, get it! Don't complain and bitch about it. Go and do something. Go and be the best at what you can be, as opposed to saying 'well, I didn't get it because of this.' No! You didn't get it because you didn't get it. Now figure out how you're going to get it if that's what you want, go and get it. But to say 50 percent of everything should be female, I think that's absolutely absurd and rubbish!" (CEO, Ag Marketing). [10]

[10] It should be noted that before the time of the interviews, there were ongoing discussions, research, and programs within Canadian agriculture circles about the prolonged absence and barriers to women in leadership (on boards, in business, and

Many women did not elaborate on what those "right" requirements would be, or who got to adjudicate them—but the tone and prevalent topic of the need for farm experience leads us to infer that some form of masculine farm credibility is a piece of what makes you "the right person for the job." This anti-affirmative stance was a way that participants discursively created a gendered "other" against who they could define themselves (or demonstrate who they were not) as ones who "earned their spot," who were legitimately the "right person for the job" and not just, "quota fillers" (Senior VP, Industry) appointed for "diversity calculations" (Senior VP, Industry). Through the process of rhetorically distancing themselves from other women (presumably those hired because of affirmative action policies), women in agriculture leadership simultaneously aligned themselves with their similarity with men (being hired on merit alone).

Those women who assessed themselves as not possessing masculine farm credibility, consistently said that they needed to go above and beyond their expected deliverables, while also putting effort into developing relationships with farmers and industry experts. "I have worked so hard to build relationships. And so, when I lacked the credibility and knowledge, I was working on building relationships" (High level civil servant, Provincial Government). Another young leader in the commodity sector noted that because men are not used to seeing young women in leadership roles there is a need for women leaders to establish legitimacy, almost immediately:

> I think that what you have to do is you have to prove yourself a lot more quickly than you would if I were a young man in this role. And so I think you have to establish credibility very quickly…the expectation is that women are going to have to work a little harder and faster. I think if you can do that, you can be a lot more confident. I don't worry about the fact that I don't have a farm background. I don't worry about the fact that I'm often in a room with much older men and I am a younger woman. I don't worry about those things *as much* if I know that I can prove myself. And it's taken me three years to get here.

Other times, women mentioned how they would be "tested" by farmers or other influential players in the sector, "they'll ask you a couple of questions to test you out, and they'll want to see what kind of knowledge you have and nine and a half out of ten times…you're gonna get a stamp of approval just because you can get across that you understood their industry without being arrogant about it" (Senior Manager, Agriculture Banking).

Granted, it appears privilege is generally conferred in this situation. But it should also be noted that the phrase, "without being arrogant about it," is another example of how women enact respectable femininity, not being aggressive or arrogant, but maintaining that warm and kind female societal role expectation in their professional display of credibility and knowledge.

agri-politics). Our research came at a time when the newly elected Federal Liberal party announced the first gender balanced cabinet, a move some of the women who were interviewed took issue with. While this may have sparked these issues to become "top of mind" with some of the women I interviewed, it is hard to say whether that bias impacted our findings and the strong anti-affirmative action sentiment prevalent therein. Our sense from the extensive conversations with women, in combination with the literature on women in leadership, was that this strong preference for merit-based achievement and aversion to "gender quotas" preceded the actions of the Federal Liberal Party.

Defending privilege: Being true to yourself and unapologetic about leadership style

Of the broad cross-section of women leaders interviewed, there was a small percentage of women (approximately 10 percent) who rejected and challenged the idea that they needed to enact a "third sex" subject positioning or that they were somehow unqualified if they did not possess enough similarity to a man via their masculine farm credibility. When women reject and/or challenge certain constructions of acceptable femininity or the requisite masculine farm credibility, they also defend their privilege. Privilege can be defended when women take a stand against prescriptive norms of respectable femininity and masculine farm credibility as being part of their legitimacy or credibility as a leader (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). For example, some of the strongest voices of dissent came from two younger women who co-founded a "Women in Agriculture" group in one of the Prairie Provinces. This organization has grown in size and recognition and is a well-used resource for many women working in agriculture in Canada. These co-founders are asking difficult questions about mental health and gender inequality within the industry, while also raising awareness around sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the institutional silencing mechanisms that prevent women from speaking out. As strong and fierce advocates for women in agriculture they argue that "we don't want the next generation of women to pay the same dues that we did.... We have to make it better for them, for whatever they're going to run up against. We should be doing everything we can" (Co-founder and President, Non-Profit). This included pushing back against expected gender performances and other expectations: "It was really just focussing on my skills and abilities and not worrying if they were feminine or masculine or how they'd be perceived" (Co-founder, Non-Profit).

When speaking about leadership and the ability to be a leader in agriculture, she said: "I think everyone in this industry is a leader in their own way, and everyone in this industry has something to contribute, no matter how big or how small it is. Whether it's your first day in the industry or you've been in the industry for seventy years."

Several other younger women, particularly in the not-for-profit sector and a few business owners, many of whom did not come from any kind of farm background, were not intimidated by the fact that they did not have masculine farm credibility because they felt that what they were doing was important and certain kinds of behaviours, gender presentation, and credentials did not have any direct impact on their work.

Another example of how one woman challenged certain gendered requirements was through her leadership style. As a long-standing civil servant, she spoke of how she refused to lead her staff in the rude, abrupt, and disrespectful way that she saw exhibited by many of her male colleagues. She outright rejected the hegemonic masculine style of leadership that she saw throughout her tenure in the agriculture department, and instead worked tirelessly to create a different and more progressive work environment for her staff, "I have been very intentional that the feminine side of me is who I am as a leader. I am not going to become the butch. I am not going to use crude language. I'm not playing that game.... And my staff will tell you that I have very high standards, but I treat them with the utmost of respect. You will never see me yelling or [using] condescending, disrespectful behaviour" (High level civil servant, Government).

She was highly aware of what she was doing and how different her approach to leadership was in that department. Part of her rebellion was also to wear "funky shoes" and have an eclectic fashion sense, thereby going against the norm of wearing conservative dress clothes and dark, drab colours.

A few women also felt that it was most important to be authentic and transparent, and that trying to "fit in" or hide their lack of farm experience was not a smart or sustainable career move. "I felt I had to be who I am…so I decided I better be true to myself because I couldn't keep up a pretense for very long and, eventually, people would see through that" (Executive Director, Non-Profit and Research). A common strategy with these women was to focus on the relationship building, and to continually build on their existing professional skills and experiences. Granted, many of them still felt the slight unease of not having the "dirt on your hands" farm experience but worked hard to not let that get in the way of their success or take up too much of their mental energy.

Discussion

In the deeply patriarchal and hegemonically masculine paradigm of agriculture in the Canadian Prairies (Kubik & Moore, 2001) leadership emerges from a complex web of gendered performances and expectations. Women in agriculture are judged on job performance, appearance, and their masculine farm credibility, while men are judged on their work (Alston, 2000; Brower, 2013; Pini, 2005). At the nexus of embodied, masculine leadership requirements and ambiguous expectations of respectable femininity, women in agricultural leadership experience a myriad of conflicting requirements of appearance and demeanour as well as overt and covert gatekeeping of high-level leadership positions. Being "the right person for the job" is a deceptively simple prerequisite for a job that has seemingly more unwritten requirements than written ones.

Respectable farm femininity thus illuminates the subtle ways in which particular historic naturalized "truths" present in on-farm theorizations of gender and agriculture, particularly rural, white, managerial masculinity, have consequences for women agricultural leaders in contemporary work contexts. While we acknowledge the ways in which on-farm gender relations are slowly changing (including a recognition that there is an imbalance) and efforts are being made to promote and train women leaders in the sector, there remain those undercurrents that signal "true" agricultural leadership can be only be garnered if there is an alignment with on-farm notions of conventional masculinity and a tangible demonstration of that likeness to men and masculinity prior to advancement.

Privilege is not guaranteed for women agricultural leaders, despite achieving high level positions and their competent performance therein. At the intersection with gender, privilege (through organizational position) is relational, fluid, and dynamic and can be stabilized or destabilized through peer approval and masculine farm credibility. Achieving the right combination of femininity and masculinity, appreciable to both men and women, farm credibility is vital to having privilege conferred by men and other women. By extending Mavin and Grandy's (2016) work vis-à-vis integrating women's appearance, behaviour, *and* on-farm masculine work into existing understandings of "conferring" and "contesting" privilege, we have furthered understanding of the instability of privilege, particularly when combined with embedded notions of managerial masculinity and acceptable femininity in the Canadian agriculture context. This research lays out the social, cultural, and political environment that women in the Canadian Prairies work in, characterized by a strong aversion to any policy or program that may give women an "unearned" advantage over men.

Accessing and maintaining privilege at the intersections of gender, body, organizational position, and previous farm experience is relational, and is played out through how women leaders conduct themselves, their appearance, and their display of masculine farm credibility. Subsequently, this is how other women and men afford them privilege and respect. When they do get respectable farm femininity "right," privilege as a leader is rewarded and conferred; for example, feeling confident that their position in the "old boys club" is a result of their hard work and tribulations on the farm. These accounts reveal a prevalence of contesting privilege, manifested through strong gatekeeping behaviour and insistence that positions of leadership should be awarded to "the right person for the job," but which raise questions about any clear norms of what those requirements, of women's appearance, behaviour, and credibility, should be.

Overall, the norms of respectable farm femininity are ambiguous. Efforts to confer, contest, and defend privilege illustrate how many women embrace, resist, fail and navigate through such nebulous constructions of acceptable femininity, farm credibility, and leadership. Our research illustrates how women may acknowledge particular constructions of respectable farm femininity, but also challenge and/or reject them, defending their right to be viewed as a leader. It is important to note that the co-founders of the "Women in Agriculture" non-profit organization have faced their share of sanctions (loss of privilege) by speaking out against the problematic status quo treatment of women in the industry. Yet, in rejecting the disciplining and gatekeeping of women and their bodies, these women's efforts to contest and defend privilege offer space for challenge and disruption—disruption that forces the industry to reckon with its history of "curiously strong prejudice" (Carter, 2016, p. 328) against women, and its equally problematic contemporary reverberations. Although they represent a very small proportion of the women interviewed for this research, we would argue that they are emblematic of a larger (albeit slow and uneven) shift among younger farmers and agricultural professionals (who often simultaneously occupy both those positions). This is evidenced by the proliferation and membership of "Women in Agriculture" groups across the Prairies, the popularity of agricultural conferences and training targeted at professional women in agriculture, as well as industry-level efforts to research and promote human diversity within the sector. Several of the participants in the fifty-five to sixty-four age range noted the shifts within their workplaces, including support for flexible work arrangements for *both* men and women with young families, as well as a general enthusiasm for supporting and mentoring young up-and-coming women with leadership potential. Changing policy and creating supportive and inclusive cultures requires a different approach than publicly naming outright sexism and refusing to follow the visible status quo, although both point to the shifting ground apparent in the industry. The women from "Women in Agriculture" appear to be a metaphorical megaphone for many of the shifts already rumbling throughout the industry.

Conclusion

In this paper we discussed women's accounts of their choices, experiences, and attitudes in agricultural leadership in the Canadian prairie provinces to illustrate the notion of respectable farm femininity. While this research is focussed on the Canadian prairie agriculture sector, we argue that it has relevance for jurisdictions elsewhere that are dominated by capitalist, industrialized agriculture. Much of the previous scholarship in this area is from regions outside of Canada (Alston et al., 2018; Alston, 2000; Liepens, 2000; Little, 2002; Pini, 2008; Whatmore, 1991), but there is a historic, political, geographic, and social likeness to the gendered issues presented here. This research may not reflect, nor be relevant to, women in agricultural leadership in the global South or sub-Saharan African agricultural sectors, however, gender has been well-studied in agriculture globally, and overwhelmingly tells a story of persistent (albeit lessening) gender inequality (Kozera-Kowalska & Uglis, 2021; Abdelali-Martini et al., 2003; Galiè et al., 2013). Scholars who study gender and agriculture in North America and Western Europe observe the ways in which agriculture is changing (e.g. technology, business management, human diversity) (Brandth, 2002), while illuminating how, despite these significant changes, certain types of rural, agricultural, hegemonic masculinities are constructed and maintained in the popular imagination (Alston, 2000). Our research findings are no exception. All the women who participated in the research were not afraid to speak of how much they loved their industry: the people, the work, and the impact they had on their communities. Further, as many of these agricultural organizations became increasingly professionalized, and as more women are joining the ranks of senior staff (although, to be clear, this number is still quite low), things are slowly and incrementally changing.

Masculine farm credibility has a particular stronghold on the unwritten job requirements of professional women in the agriculture sector as it is used to confer and contest privilege. It is an added dimension of the already complicated minefield women must navigate in their organizational environment, a condition that is often beyond their control and sometimes not related to their actual job requirements. Our analysis focussed on an agriculture-specific tenet of the masculine stereotypes connected to leadership more broadly, while layering it onto the already established notions of respectable femininity that women feel pressure to enact as leaders, particularly in male dominated fields.

This research comes at a time when women in leadership has become a popular and debated topic within many agriculture circles in Canada. Amid this discourse, women are challenging and rejecting the antiquated and unfair discourses, processes and requirements that are assumed to be normative in the agriculture world. These challenges are sometimes minor (wearing "funky" shoes) and from the margins (non-profit), but they are undeniably gaining a foothold within the minds and hearts of women in all sectors and levels of agriculture. Women defend their privilege by insisting that their diligent work, professional skills, and strong relationships are key to their success and legitimacy as leaders, not their ability to drive a tractor, own a pickup truck, shovel manure, or endure a crop failure.

By drawing attention to and defining respectable farm femininity we have communicated its potential power in constraining women's inclusion and opportunities in the agricultural sector while at the same time strengthening women's agency in becoming more aware of the antiquated and irrelevant logic on which it is based. Furthermore, without addressing the role of androcentrism in the intractable problems related to food production, distribution, and consumption globally, solutions will be incomplete, as patriarchal structures will continue to be reproduced and thus, women will continue to be marginalized.

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Original Research Article

Can historians order off the menu?: A method for historical menu analysis

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Abstract

While historians have used menus to tell part of the histories of restaurants, little guidance has been provided on how we should approach these unique culinary documents. This lack of instruction becomes more apparent in light of the impressive amount of archival work and digitization of historical menus done in recent years. As a response, this article presents a method that I have developed for analyzing menus. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives as well as experience teaching and researching with menus, this method recognizes menus as documents that can reveal the many relationships and connections intersecting in, flowing through, and making up restaurants. This method is divided into four steps: 1) (Un)Identifiable details; 2) Logics/story; 3) Mess or Marginalia; and 4) Cross-Menu comparison. By moving the reader through the method and offering an example of historical menu analysis, this article demonstrates some of the many historical insights that emerge through careful consideration of these sources.

Keywords: Menus; food history; primary source analysis; Asian Canadian studies; interdisciplinarity

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Résumé

Les historiens utilisent les menus pour raconter une partie de l'histoire des restaurants, mais jusqu'ici, peu d'indications ont été données sur la manière d'aborder ces documents culinaires uniques. Cette lacune devient plus évidente encore avec l'impressionnant travail d'archivage et de numérisation des menus historiques réalisé ces dernières années. En guise de réponse, cet article présente une méthode que j'ai développée pour analyser les menus. S'appuyant sur des perspectives interdisciplinaires ainsi que sur une expérience de l'enseignement et de la recherche dans le domaine des menus, cette méthode considère les menus comme des documents susceptibles de révéler les nombreux liens et rapports qui s'entremêlent dans les restaurants, qui les traversent et les constituent. Cette méthode est divisée en quatre étapes : 1) les détails (non) identifiables ; 2) la logique / l'histoire ; 3) le désordre ou les notes marginales ; et 4) la comparaison entre les menus. En guidant le lecteur ou la lectrice à travers la méthode et en proposant un exemple d'analyse de menu historique, cet article démontre quelques-unes des nombreuses informations historiques qui ressortent d'un examen attentif de ces sources.

Introduction

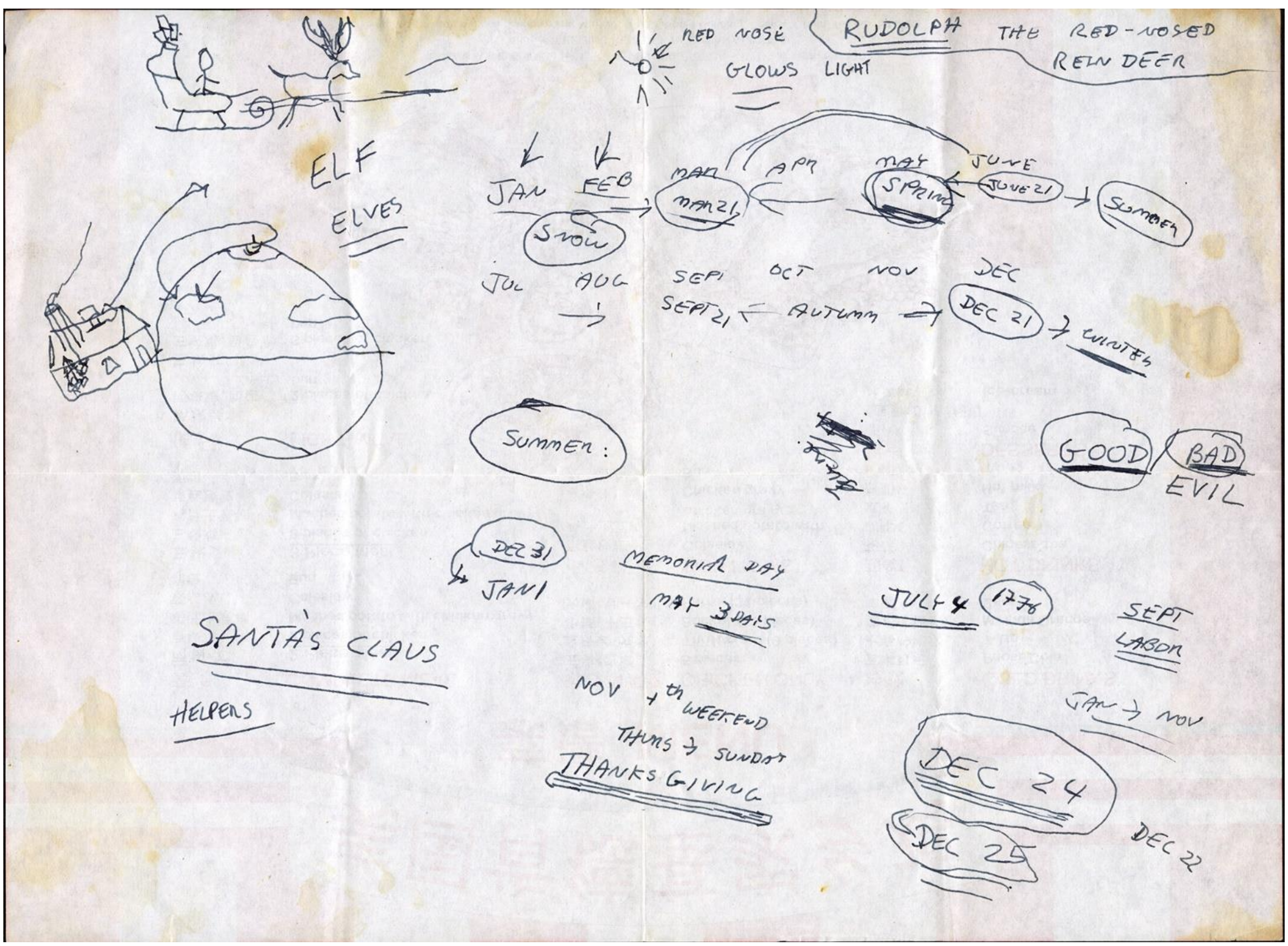
Scribbles of a flying reindeer pulling a sleigh, a nose embellished with lines and the word "GLOWS" underlined two times, a house with an arrow pointing to the north pole, dates such as July 4th and December 24th/25th, all garnished with what appear to be grease stains: these are part of a collection of images, diagrams, and short phrases found on the back of a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) menu, offering what seems to be a fairly thorough explanation of American holiday lore. Before we cast this menu aside, as the restaurateur and diner probably intended, we flip the menu to its front and notice that this KFC menu did not come from the possibly assumed franchise in the United States but rather from a location in Beijing, China (*美国肯德基家乡鸡菜谱 Menu*, n.d.).

This is one of my favourite menus from the Harley J. Spiller collection, currently housed at the University of Toronto Scarborough, because it reminds us of the many conversations that occur over restaurant tables. The doodles evoke questions about this interaction between an impromptu menu cartoonist and whoever they dined with. Why did this knowledge sharing occur? Was/were the individual(s) they were dining with interested or confused? Did they have a good idea about American holidays by the end of it? Did the KFC's location prompt this conversation? Did they feel closer together after the drawings were finished? These are potentially unanswerable questions of a tantalizing historical moment that sources like this illuminate and provoke. Questions like these represent a familiar frustration to historians who are tasked with interpreting what we can and cannot glean from each primary source.

With examples like this, without a date or any clear indication as to who drew these cartoons or who was there to listen to their explanation, we often have to take the conservative approach and not include these messy drawings within official history. However, as the growing archival presence of menus suggests, many are starting to believe that the record menus leave behind is too good to pass up. This growing archival presence encourages hope that we will find or create the tools to meaningfully interpret these traces of assumed lost, day-to-day culinary interactions between/amongst diners and restaurateurs. This article and its method add to this effort by arguing that, through investing time and care in analyzing these documents, food historians can find new opportunities to engage with histories and memories of joy, reunion, negotiation, argumentation, and conversation between and amongst diners and restaurateurs.

Using Chinese North American menus, this article provides guidance on how historians may approach analyzing and interpreting historical menus through encouraging contemporary readers and historians to form more conscious and embodied relations to the items they analyze. In this process, this article illuminates how a close reading of menus can not only provide insight into the historical subjectivities of restaurateurs and the worlds and moments they create through their restaurants but also reveal the many intimate relationships formed around the restaurant table.

Figure 1: Back of a menu - University of Toronto Scarborough Library, Archives & Special Collections, Harley Spiller Collection – 1-6



What is [on] a menu? [A literature review]

It would be incorrect to say that menus have not been studied, and it is helpful to the historian to recognize the diverse disciplinary ways these documents have been considered. Scholars and researchers, in hospitality in particular, have produced a robust literature about the thought and business strategy that go into the creation and function of menus (Ozdemir & Caliskan, 2014). Sociologists have used menus to teach and explain social class through coding exercises that pay attention to prices, assumed specialized knowledge, text structure, and design (Wright & Ransom, 2005). Priscilla Ferguson (2005) identified menus, along with meals and markets, as useful categories in identifying the interconnected, convertible, and transformative qualities of food as it navigates the movements from production to consumption, material to symbolic. However, she focused on "menus" as a collection of dishes or food repertoires rather than menus as documents and primary sources which provide unique insight into broader notions of edibility and taste.

Museum studies scholar Irina Mihalache (2016) examined menus in the context of museum restaurants as a way to interrogate the interpretive potentials of food in multisensorial engagements with museum exhibitions, highlighting the ways food can engage communities of visitors through modes of knowledge-making, taste, and culinary encounters. Menu collectors have also thought critically about these documents, seeing menus as "tangible evidence" of the relationships that allow the world to work (Schinto, 2005, p. 74). Harley Spiller (2004), noted Chinese restaurant menu collector, has also shown how menus can help uncover a fuller picture of Chinatown nightclubs in 1930s San Francisco through documenting the food and more importantly drink options that kept patrons dancing through the night. Henry Voigt (n.d.) has also done extensive work uncovering the histories of American menus, revealing how, as he puts it, menus "reflect the aspirations and ideals of society". Chefs themselves also offer insight into the creation and use of menus; for example, celebrated chef Cecilia Chiang (2015) described the detailed ways she developed her menus in response to diners in San Francisco, beginning with around 300 items and whittling them down to the dishes American diners liked.

Two academic disciplines have offered especially helpful guidance to historians in how we might approach this unique type of primary source: linguistics and literary studies. From the field of linguistics, scholars have emphasized the ways menus document the "interconnectedness" of our food through how it is encoded into language. Yao and Su (2019) outlined different perspectives to consider in applied linguistics research, such as how food names might reveal the history of the global economy and language contact and how price information is encoded in the language of restaurant menus. Their work builds on the work of Dan Jurafsky (2014), who used computational linguistic methods among others to explore how this immense "interconnectedness" in the language of food can help us to understand or to question how food has changed between different contexts. As historians, perhaps we can turn to our colleagues in linguistics as a challenge to further enmesh their insights into language within the many aspects that define our existence. In turn, we can see their expansive interconnectedness and careful attention to trends within enviable data sets as inspiration to broaden and more collaboratively situate our historical analyses.

Literary scholars have also led the way in menu analysis by providing modes of close reading that illuminate the potential and possible dynamics underlying menus. Nathalie Cooke (2021), in her introduction to the Bloomsbury illustrated menu collection, considers how asking the "seemingly simple questions like 'What is a menu? What information does it contain? What does it do?'" can begin to uncover how these pieces of ephemera "convey meaning to the diners of their day as well as to readers and scholars of later generations". Relatedly, Lily Cho's (2010b) argument for a more "agential" reading of small town Chinese Canadian restaurant menus allows us to consider how the menus can illuminate the agency of restaurateurs, where through this document Chinese Canadian restaurateurs are able to participate in "the engineering of a mechanics of incorporation" (pp. 51, 58) and deciding cultural representation. Robert Ji-Song Ku (2014), relatedly, in his discussion of Chinese American restaurant menus, describes how many Chinese restaurants have multiple menus: "an English version for "outsiders," a Chinese version for "insiders," a bilingual menu, a "secret" (i.e., unwritten) menu for the "very" insiders, and so forth" (p. 66). Ku's (2014) observation not only illuminates how menus for some can serve as a *gate* rather than a *guide* to "Authentic" or insider Chinese cuisine but also serves as a critical reminder to the food historian of the multiple positionalities potentially refracted within the menus that remain.

Together, close readings of menus encourage us to consider the ways these primary sources reveal the perspectives of the restaurateurs that created them and the conversations or negotiations between restaurateurs and customers that leave traces on these menus. We can pause to think about how our understandings of menus as "maps," as the French name for menus, *La Carte,* suggests, to the dishes and cuisines featured in a restaurant does not fully capture the amount of work these documents do for restaurateurs and how much they can reveal or obscure to the food historian. While authored and edited by restaurateurs, these documents were created in conversation with multiple actors and entities from diners and chefs to policies and markets. It is the centrality of restaurateurs within menus that provides a critical opportunity to understand how the restaurants produced the settings and atmospheres for diners to form their own worlds and relationships. Menus, then, present a challenging but rewarding historical puzzle that can open up dimensions to the histories of restaurants, reflecting the immense amount of work and networking that restaurateurs do when creating a restaurant.

Food historians have also used menus as part of their analyses. For example, Maria McGrath (2016) followed the ways the Bloodroot restaurant used their menu to embody and practice their radical lesbian ethics and present their challenges to patriarchal, capitalistic, misogynist oppressive systems. Yong Chen (2014) used menus in his discussion of the "authenticity" of Chinese food, including how non-Chinese customers sought it out in the twentieth century as well as how dishes like chop suey, chow mein, and egg foo young fell out of fashion in the Post-War Years. Rebecca Spang (2001), in her foundational history of the French restaurant, also showed how menus "made it possible to imagine a restaurant's limits, extent, and confines" and even "collaps[e] time and space into the restaurant's own never-never land, in a manner that abolished the first and reified the latter" (pp. 190–193). Art historian Alison Pearlman (2018) has also recently offered one of the most comprehensive analyses of menus, focusing on the persuasiveness of menus and how they function as "mediators of the restaurateur-diner relationship" (p. 5). Despite these insightful examples, there has been little direct guidance on how to research and analyze menus as a historian in order to produce work like that done by the historians mentioned in this paragraph.

One very notable exception to this is cultural historian L. Sasha Gora (2022), who has recently provided the most direct and helpful guidance on how to read menus as cultural texts that "frame the relationships between chefs, servers, and diners" (p. 119); Gora (2022) then helpfully asks us to consider questions such as, "what stories does a menu tell about the cuisine it seeks to represent? What language does it use and what knowledge does it assume?" and "why these dishes now?" (p. 119). I whole-heartedly agree with Gora's (2022) framing of menus as relational texts; I turned to menus in my research on Chinese Canadian and Chinese American foodways for exactly this reason, as a unique opportunity to uncover the intercultural relationships between Chinese diasporic restaurateurs and their diverse customers. In many ways, this article and its menu analysis methodology grows in conversation with Gora's (2022) understandings of menus, hoping to provide another form of guidance on how historians can continue to more fully consider the historical knowledge hidden within menus.

The menu analysis methodology presented here builds on Gora's (2022) in a few different ways. For example, instead of asking "how can you look beyond your own appetite in order to read menus as cultural texts?" (p. 119), as Gora (2022) does, this method encourages us to recognize and embrace our appetites as part of historical analysis. Through dimensions of speculation and close analysis, this menu analysis methodology encourages a form of active relationship building between the historian and historical restaurateurs, servers, and diners that works to honor and create a dialogue with the original intents and purposes of these documents. This method also expands on Gora's (2022) analysis by providing more detailed guidance on how to navigate the "challenge to not read menus too literally" (p. 123), as Gora (2022) identifies, by showing especially how one might move between the many details and information on the menu to the more "macro" level analyses and historical conclusions we may draw from them.

Balancing "micro" and "macro" analyses of menus can help us to continually find historical meanings in these documents. Daniel Bender (2023), in his history of "Food Adventurers," briefly draws on menus to trace how hotels and steamships reflected gastro-touristic commitments to "Continental tastes" that "not only refused local ingredients but ignored local culinary traditions and religious prohibitions" (p. 70). Bender (2023) places these menus within broader arguments around global travel and tourism, providing examples of processes where closer attention to menus can provide further insight into the many meals these menus facilitated. For example, we could take the image of the September 2, 1934 menu of the Franconia cruise ship, which Bender (2023) includes in his introduction. Using the menu analysis method outlined in this article, we could pursue future research; for example, paying closer attention to the types of ingredients mentioned on the menu (e.g., loganberry, prime sirloin, spinach, potatoes, French beans) could allow us to think about provisioning of the ship and constructions of culinary imaginaries around "Continental" and global foodways. We could sit with when and how "menu French" appears on the menu, where certain dishes appear in French (e.g., "Mousse de Volaille en Aspic"), in English (e.g., "Prime Sirloin & Ribs of Beef"), or a mix of both (e.g., Noisette of Mutton—Nicoise"), to consider how politics of social class might have been experienced or performed by historical diners. Or, lastly, attention to details like the description found at the bottom of the menu: "Passengers on Special Diet are especially invited to make known their requirements to the Head Waiter," could launch inquiries into whose diets are considered not "special" when read against the dishes that are present on the menu. In this way, the method outlined in this article aims to provide guidance on how to trace these kinds of connections as well as to encourage us to research along with previous and current food historians as we read and engage with their work (especially if they are generous enough to include images of the menus they reference!).

Hungry in the archive

Especially in the past decade or so, archivists and collectors have amassed, organized, and made available thousands of historical menus (Appendix 1). Many of these North American-based collections have been, or are in the process of being, digitized, meaning that historians have unprecedented access and the ability to analyze a diversity of menus from around the world and across multiple time periods. The menu analysis methodology presented here reflects this accessibility through its fourth step, which challenges historians to notice trends across different menus. We may also consider here not only the roles digital humanities methodologies have played in shaping the ways we interact with menus but also how digital humanities can and will shape our analyses in the future. This is where we can return to the challenges or topics posed by our colleagues in linguistics or sociology and challenge ourselves to think about how our historical questions and answers will change through the way we can access the past.

It is also important to note that menu archives are not new, especially within the realms of hospitality and culinary trade. For example, the Culinary Institute of America's menu collection has been around since at least 1978, and chefs and restaurateurs have been developing personal collections for much longer (the Robert Bon Lee Collection, now housed at the University of Toronto Scarborough, is a great example of one of these). Keeping this context in frame helps us to remember that menus are a culmination of multiple influences and factors and that relationships between seemingly distant menus may not necessarily be coincidental. For this reason, menus should be handled with an open mind that can more fully embrace the agency of those who put these documents together as well as the myriad of connections (between scholars, chefs, librarians, archivists, collectors, and diners) that shaped the eventual configuration of these documents.

One of the most common questions or sentiments I have encountered while researching, teaching, or discussing menus goes along the lines of: "How do you not get hungry while researching?" or "Wow, now I just want Peking duck." Whether historical or contemporary, working with menus often encourages us to interact with them in the ways that the restaurateurs and chefs originally intended. Instead of shying away from our appetites, I suggest that we centre them when analyzing menus. In fact, one of my favourite questions to ask students is, "what would you order?", not because it encourages them to "put themselves in the shoes of historical figures," but because it encourages them to develop a personal relationship with the documents they are interacting with. Unlike more traditional primary sources such as diary entries, newspaper articles, or government documents, which are easier to approach as *distant* documents that we do not have relationships to beyond historical inquiry, we have been conditioned to interact with menus through our own personal tastes, hungers, and desires. This insight is not limited to menus; other culinary texts like cookbooks and recipes inspire a similar interactivity (Cooke & Lucas, 2017; Driver, 2009; Tompkins, 2013). Perhaps this represents a challenge and an opportunity for food historians to encourage more embodied engagements with the past. To ignore or deny our appetites, I believe, is a missed opportunity to not only promote a historiographical consciousness where our own present being critically informs how we hope to use these sources to uncover specific pasts and write specific histories, but also to encourage more personalized and meaningful connections to the past.

One of the reviewers of this article questioned how far we can take these connections, asking if, with my question of what I mean to "order off" a menu as a historian, I was encouraging readers to partake in "even another layer of engagement by suggesting we find the foods on contemporary menus and try them?" While I surprisingly have not tried this myself, nor have encouraged my students to do so, I do think it might yield interesting reflections. In the future, I look forward to thinking through how engagements with menus might foster meaningful connections with contemporary restaurants and foods that support us (whether we recognize it or not) as we conduct our research. The method outlined below is a beginning to developing even more embodied and relational ways of engaging with menus that open the historian up to the multiple possible insights of menus.

For now, I do encourage researchers to pay attention to your stomach and how these menus draw your attention as you move through the steps outlined below. For example, while identifying the dishes available, take note of which ones you would, or actively would not, like to order, and reflect on why. On the Lichee Garden menu, which is analyzed in more depth later in this article, there are a few dishes described as "balled chicken" that caught my attention and made we wish I could order them now (Lichee Garden, 1955). This allowed for a brief reflection on how I am engaging with these menus through my own curiosity about a Chinese Canadian dish—chicken balls with sweet and sour sauce—and how I might be processing these menus through different ways of engaging with an imagined "Other's" food (Germann Molz, 2007; hooks, 1992).

From there, I can ask myself questions like: why am I looking for a distinct Chinese Canadian food? Is it because I myself am not Canadian and may be looking for the differences between Chinese Canadian and American experiences? Why am I interested in these different varieties of Chinese dishes? These questions have both personal and professional answers. More important than these answers, however, is the critical recognition that our desires and tastes as historians inherently shape the way we analyze texts. By paying attention to our embodied experiences, we can further cultivate critical awareness of how we engage with primary sources. From this awareness vis-à-vis our sources, we can ask questions like: How can what appeals to us today help us not only measure the distance between us and historical diners and chefs but also help us to remain critical of what we as historians or scholars are *ordering* these documents to do? Together, these points speak to a sense of empathy building between the historian and the past, where we as historians are in a better posture or stance to grow and remain curious with the past rather than understanding it as solely a source of solid answers.

How to read a menu: A method

I developed this method of historical menu analysis through the process of developing and teaching menu analysis workshops in Chinese Canadian, Global Asias, and food history classes, as well as on close readings of menus for my research on Chinese Canadian and Chinese American foodways. Due to the multiple teaching and research contexts, I found that it was important for the method to encourage openminded readings that cast a wide net for potential insight into the possible inner workings of restaurants. At the same time, my method of menu analysis encourages engagement with the point of view of the restaurateur, as well as exchanges between diners, in order to not only provide answers to historical queries but more importantly to inspire further questions on culinary histories.

This method is divided into three steps, with a bonus fourth step dependent on the availability of menus (which has been facilitated by the archival work mentioned earlier and will continue to grow): 1) (Un)Identifiable details; 2) Logics/story; 3) Mess or Marginalia; and 4) Cross-Menu comparison. The first three steps build on each other, starting with more straightforward documentation and moving toward more speculative considerations.

(Un)identifiable details:

This first step simply asks you to identify everything possible on the menu. This could include details such as the name of the restaurant, location, hours, prices, type of menu (e.g., take-out menu, in-house menu, online, banquet, special occasion), the materiality of the menu (is it laminated, handwritten, written on paper or cardstock, printed, bound, oral, etc.), dish names, type of meals offered (and when), images/artwork, languages used, font used, and any descriptions available. For this step, stick only to details that are directly discernable from the menu itself, rather than information that is inferable. This step aims to set a foundation for your analysis by providing a long and diverse list of notes and materials to more expansively consider in the more speculative analyses in steps two and three.

These details can also help to deduce more information about the restaurant when read along with other primary sources. For example, the location of the restaurant can help to date the menu when read against city directories or newspaper advertisements, which are much more likely to have a date attached. Additionally, the names of dishes could be cross-referenced with restaurant reviews or oral histories, which may provide more descriptive and sensorial details of the food.

Next, we need to consider what *cannot* be identified from the menu. The often-omitted detail of menus that the historian most likely finds the most frustrating is the date. I ask here for a pause to consider the meaning of this omission. First, the lack of dates, especially on in-house menus, may reflect the restaurateur's expectation of longevity for their menus, or it may, either intentionally or not, play with the expectations of time often placed on restaurant food. The same food served at a restaurant can be expected to be "new" and "modern" by one diner and a "comfort" and "old-standby" by another. This consideration of audience speaks to what Rebecca Spang (2001) described, which I repeat here, as how "[t]he menu collapsed time and space into the restaurant's own never-never land, in a manner that abolished the first and reified the latter" (p. 190). The attention to omissions or a sense of "timelessness" further invites us to consider how we as contemporary readers are relating to these documents.

Apart from the date, other consistently (un)identifiable details on menus may include who wrote the menu as well as the actual physical composition of dishes. For the latter, Gora (2022), citing Lily Cho (2010a), notes that "a menu 'textualizes the food,'" and that "there is a gap between the food itself and its textual representation" (Cho, 2010a, p. 52). Additionally, ambiguous authorship also reminds us to consider the possibilities of multiple authorship, plagiarism, and/or collaboration that could underly the production of the menus. These will also vary from menu to menu depending on the type of menu or restaurant, for example. It may also be interesting to note whether more commonly identifiable details are not present on the menu; this could help us to infer how the restaurateur may have wanted their customers to engage with their restaurant.

Logics or story

This step asks you to use the details identified in the first step to piece together any logic or stories created by the menu. Finding the logic or stories held within menus invites the historian to begin analyzing the text, encouraging them to carefully connect the previously identified details together to form tentative conclusions about how the restaurateur may have wanted their diners to engage with their restaurant and food.

As Gora (2022) argues, "menus tell stories;" however, the transparency and vibrancy of those stories varies widely from menu to menu. For example, some menus quite literally include written stories: stories of the restaurant, stories from the culture their cuisine seeks to represent, or stories about different locations. The menu of Sai Woo restaurant in Toronto, in a blurb authored by "The Management," describes how "Mings, Monguls and Manchurians conquered the Cantonese people, to be conquered in turn by Cantonese culinary art" (Sai Woo, n.d.). Here, the management of Sai Woo do not simply provide a succinct Chinese history lesson for their diners but strategically position their Cantonese cuisine as a "conqueror," which is ready to conquer diners at Sai Woo just as had legendary conquerors of the past. Stories such as these can provide us with information about what restaurateurs expected their diners to know or, which is often the case for ethnic cuisines, what they expected their diners to not know. Here, the management of Sai Woo, it seems, assumes diners to have very little knowledge of Chinese cuisine; however, later in the text they make comparisons to French cuisine, stating that "Cantonese culinary art was as famous in Oriental countries as French cuisine was in Occidental ones" (Sai Woo, n.d.). This invocation of French cuisine assumes a knowledge of French dominance in North American restaurant culture, and, in the case of Sai Woo and Chinese cuisine in Toronto, it also more specifically reflects a shift in Chinese cuisine in the city from being considered a more working-class, cheap option into the realm of *cuisine* and middle- to upper-class consumption.

Sometimes the story of a menu is not as obvious when no long paragraphs or prose are included. In this case, it is more helpful to think about finding the "logic" of the menu. Thinking about the logic of a menu can help us gain insight into the possible ways that restaurateurs hoped to shape the experiences of diners. Steps toward finding underlying logic to the menus can be tricky or, at the very least, not straightforward. It is helpful to begin with considering the following: how the menu organizes dishes and meals, how dishes are priced, if there are any deals or combos, when different or multiple languages are used or explained, and if there are any warnings or symbols included on the menu. Referencing Pearlman's (2018) work as a collection of motifs and strategies used by restaurateurs through menus can also be a particularly helpful resource in brainstorming the large variety of logics we might be looking for when analyzing menus. For example, the materiality or format of the menu might help to reveal the "logic" or story of the menu. If the menu is laminated, we might be able to speculate on how and for how long the menu was expected to be used within its restaurant.

A "logic"-based analysis is helpful for menus such as a takeout menu from another Toronto Chinese restaurant, Kwongchow Tavern. This specific menu from Kwongchow contains only minimal text beyond lists of dishes and dish categories (Kwongchow Tavern, 1970). However, the number of dishes is dizzying, and with close attention insightful details emerge when considering the above. To begin, the Kwongchow menu organizes their dishes into twenty-nine categories, ranging from specific types of dishes (e.g., Chop Suey, Chow Mein, Cantonese Chow Mein, and Won Ton Noodles in Broth) and dishes based on the type of protein featured (e.g., Beef dishes, Seafoods, and Pork dishes) to more meal-based categories (e.g., Special Chinese Banquet Menu, Canadian dinners, and Desserts) and categories based on preparation technique/sauce (e.g., Curried Dishes, Oriental Style, and Sweet and Sour). Certain categories feature significantly more dishes than others; for example, Cantonese Chow Mein includes fifty-five options, compared to the section on Canadian Dinner which only includes five options. The number of dishes could suggest a myriad of things, including the type of kitchen the restaurant had, the adaptability of certain dish types, a desire to express a sense of abundance, or the popularity of a dish.

The menu does include sub-lists of ingredients underneath some dishes. For example, under Chow Mein it reads "(with Bean Sprouts)," while under Cantonese Chow Mein it reads "(No Bean Sprouts, Fried Soft Noodles);" from this detail, we can capture some of the subtle ways the restaurateurs behind Kwongchow educate their diners about what makes a Cantonese Chow Mein different from a non-Cantonese one. Under other dishes, they occasionally further describe what "Eight Precious Pearl style" means, as well as the ingredient components of the "Bird's Nest Stuffed Special." Another important aspect of this menu is how it organizes select dishes into "Special Full Course Dinners," which allow diners to each order a selection of dishes rather than ordering a dish that is meant to be shared, as well as providing dinner sets so that a group of diners can eat Chinese food in the manner which is more typical: family style. This shows how, even without a dynamic story, menus can still illuminate some of the inner workings or inner "logic" of restaurant life.

Mess or "marginalia"

This step challenges the food historian to make sense of the markings and mess that users of the menus have left behind. As culinary documents, menus expand on the types of marginalia typically expected in historical records. We can begin with the typical marginalia that can adorn menus, such as crossed out and rewritten prices or, if one is really lucky, a collection of signatures and a date (a practice sometimes followed in order to commemorate a special occasion). These details serve as important historical clues that can help to date or trace the menu over time, transforming a timeless document into a time-full one where diners have done part of the work of the historian, reminding us of the relationships held over the table. Or, as we saw from the menu I highlighted at the beginning of this article, sometimes entire pictorial stories are told in doodles in the blank spaces of menus.

Other subtler forms of "marginalia" can be equally thought-provoking; for example, menu collector Harley J. Spiller (2004) has noted that small pencil marks next to certain dishes could suggest that they were often recommended by wait staff. Moving towards the more niche "marginalia" or mess that has been added to menus, as culinary documents, menus can also accrue stains, burn marks, and folds in the pages that reflect their use. While temporally frustrating, taking account of marginalia and mess provides important speculative insight into how we might uncover the history of these documents. For example, returning to the KFC menu from the beginning of this article, how might the Christmas and North American holiday explanations inspire further historical inquiry into this restaurant? How could we learn more about the possible intercultural exchanges that may have happened at KFC in Beijing? Additionally, as my colleague and friend Valeria Mantilla Morales pointed out to me, the elaborateness of marginalia might reflect the comfort customers had in staying in the restaurant long enough to draw all of these images or, at the very least, take the placemat home and draw on it later.

Marginalia and mess then work as crucial reminders of the multi-temporalities of these menus, which may have experienced a history of use in their respective restaurants. Some were meant to be taken or thrown away quickly after printing, while others may have been bound and stayed in their restaurants, with small written-in changes to adapt to changes in price and tastes. These reminders help us to further consider the multiple and diverse interactions that happen over the restaurant table.

Cross-menu comparison

Because of the incredible efforts of archivists and librarians, the accessibility of historical menus has never been higher. With this accessibility comes many opportunities for cross-menu comparison across multiple variables that can help food historians better trace changes across time and connections between culinary geographies. With an abundance of menus, one can begin to trace the geographic scope of a dish like chop suey, which is often assumed to be an American-created dish but can actually be found around the world, from Annecy (France) to Nairobi (Kenya) to Bombay (India). Within this scope, we can also see similarities, differences, and occasionally hints into how dishes arrived or were presented across different regions. For example, chicken, beef, and pork appear as proteins in chop suey consistently across regions (e.g., in New York, Annecy, and Nairobi), however, in a menu from Eastern Chinese Restaurant in Bombay, chop suey dishes are described as "American Chop Suey" and "Chinese Chop Suey," details that may reveal possibly unexpected global migrations. Thorough cross-menu comparison may also reveal dishes that are seemingly unique to specific geographies, for example "Gelato Fritto Cinese" (Chinese Fried Gelato), a dish that journalist Jennifer 8 Lee (2008) has previously identified as an Italian-Chinese specialty. In this way, cross comparing menus offers an invaluable way of tracing and documenting the global movements of Chinese people and foodways.

The abundance of archived menus now also occasionally offers an opportunity to trace how an individual restaurant has changed over time. By examining multiple menus from the same restaurant, historians can witness some of the daily flows and shifts restaurants undergo throughout their lifetimes. From dishes being added or subtracted, shifts in address, and design changes to the addition of policies on lost items and marginalia, the growing pains and pleasures of restaurants are unveiled. In the next section, I show how analysis of a set of menus from a Chinese restaurant in Toronto can reveal a transformation from an "authentic" and "exotic" fine-dining destination into a Chinese Canadian institution and take-out restaurant.

An example: Eating at Lichee Garden

Lichee Garden opened in 1948 in Toronto's first main Chinatown, located right next to some of the city's main business and political centres. Lichee Garden was a core member of four large Chinese restaurants, known locally as the "Big Four," that dynamically changed how Chinese food was eaten and thought of in the city. Prior to these restaurants, chop suey joints and takeaway dominated the Chinese food scene, but with elegant dining rooms and extensive menus the Big Four convinced non-Chinese Torontonians that Chinese restaurant food could be more than takeout and cheap eating (Lee, 2000, p. 59). While fuller histories need to be written about these restaurants, here I focus on some of their menus to demonstrate how some of the insights of menu analysis can reveal the intercultural dimensions of the history of Lichee Garden. I will focus on a Lichee Garden menu from the Harley J. Spiller Collection (File 3-23, Item 2), and then I will briefly compare it with a few other menus from the Harley J. Spiller and the Robert Bon Lee Collections housed at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

This in-house menu from Lichee Garden begins with the name of the restaurant in the centre of the cover, framed by bamboo, two lichee fruits in the corner, and a header reading "famous Chinese food" directly above the name (Lichee Garden, 1955). In the top right corner is the only Chinese text on the menu: 荔園酒家, the restaurant's Chinese name. The bottom of the cover has the restaurant's business hours, from eleven a.m. to five a.m., and the restaurant's address. It is an in-house menu that folds once, with two pages in the middle and a back cover. The two internal pages include lists of dishes in four columns: 1) Dinners for ranging from two to six diners; 2) four categories: "Selection of Soups," "Boiled Noodles," "Sea Foods in Season," and "Rice;" 3) four categories: "Special Suggestions," "Chop Suey," "Salads" (which come with bread and butter), and "Chow Mein;" 4) five categories: "Poultry Suggestions," "Tender Steaks" served with bread, butter, and French-fried potatoes, "Eggs in Oriental Fashion," and "Miscellaneous." The "Sea Foods in Season" section is the longest with twenty-five dishes, followed by "Poultry Suggestions" (twenty-three dishes) and "Special Suggestions" (twenty-two dishes). The prices range from $0.15 for a bowl of steamed rice to $4.50 for Filet Mignon, which included bread and butter and French-fried potatoes as well as Lichee Lobster served with sweet and pungent sauce.

The top of the middle page outlines that liquor, which is specified to include spirits, beer, and wine, is served with meals only. The bottom of the menu tells us that single orders can be served for two for $0.25 more and that the minimum charge per person is $0.50. The dishes primarily seem to be Chinese and Chinese Canadianized dishes, with some "Western" dishes mixed in (e.g., the dishes under the Tender Steak section). The back cover includes the most prose, with a figure on how to use chopsticks that includes illustrations on the left with a warning at the very bottom that says: "WE regret we cannot assume responsibilities for lost or mislaid articles." On the right side there are four paragraphs under the heading

"CREATED FOR YOUR EATING PLEASURE," and below that is an advertisement for Mon Kuo Trading Company with an illustration and then the text "J. H. Bell & Son, Printers, 17 Scarlett Rd. LY. 7758." In terms of language, the menu is primarily in English apart from the Chinese name of the menu and the Romanized names of certain dishes, like chow mein, Dong Koo Wat Guy, and Yet Ca Mein. From the text and the art on the menu, some unidentifiable details include the date as well as pictures or descriptions (beyond a few ingredients listed) of the dishes. These details can be typed as they are above or organized into a spreadsheet or notes. This step is designed to encourage the researcher to pause, thoroughly look through the entire menu, and note possible avenues for future analysis.

For step two, the most straightforward storytelling in this menu is on the back cover. Beginning with the paragraphs in the righthand column, the menu sets the setting of Lichee Garden's story. It first extends a "very warm welcome to enjoy the finest of Chinese foods," before describing how they created "the atmosphere of the Far East" that is "unexcelled on the American continent." They believe that the connoisseur would "hold in high esteem the flavour and excellence of [their] foods," due to the careful preparation of "century-old recipes" under "the most rigid standards of cleanliness in modern, streamlined kitchens." And, for those who may not know Chinese food, the menu lets you know that they have "experts" on hand to "make suggestions and explain the traditions of eating that are famous throughout the world." The menu also outlines some of the expected functions they hoped to help host, from student, church, and club dinners to wedding parties and business functions. This active scene-setting already begins to explain some of the unidentifiable details from step one, revealing that the restaurateurs sought to meet the needs of both knowledgeable and new diners; the exclusion of dish descriptions/images and the large number of dishes were there not to intimidate less experienced diners but to meet the desires of the pickiest connoisseur, and possibly to encourage conversation between diners and workers at Lichee Garden.

The figure on the left side of the back cover outlines some of the insight the restaurant's experts might bestow in the form of a diagram on how to eat with chopsticks. The actual text instructions on how to use chopsticks are very minimal, but they do suggest that learning to use chopsticks is an easy and empowering process. Premised with "Get Ready," "Set," and "Go," the diagrams outline how diners will quickly be able to lift "flat food," "odd bits," and "round objects." On top of the diagram, under the heading "CHOPSTICKS," the menu states: "The Chinese use chopsticks because they consider the knife and fork barbaric. 'We sit at the table to eat, not to cut up carcasses,' they say." Here, the restaurateurs set up an interesting positioning of Chinese cuisine and food practices vis-à-vis Western cuisines, where Chinese cuisine is equal if not superior to Western cuisines. Their use of the word "they" and the third person here also unclearly position the experts of Lichee Garden against Chineseness, where the folks behind Lichee Garden, who are presumably Chinese, are for some reason not included with the Chinese who deem forks and knives barbaric. This positioning reinforces a sense that the folks at Lichee Garden are there to guide Canadian diners through the world of Chinese cuisine and, in some ways, mediate between an Otherness they invoked and their patrons, who are encouraged to be fascinated with Chinese culture and to understand the folks at Lichee as authorities on the matter. This interpretation of this story in the menu reflects the ways restaurants have been understood as places where power can be negotiated, restructured, and manipulated (Cho, 2010a, p. 114,129; Finkelstein, 2014, p. vii).

As part of the personal reflective portion of this menu analysis, as a fourth-generation Chinese American, I have found myself always coming back to this part of the menu. Part of this return comes from my own experience of being both Othered but also celebrated for my use of chopsticks growing up, where the ability to use chopsticks was a metric of how "Chinese" I was (Song-Nichols, 2021, pp. 85–86). To see this menu assert a pride in Chinese foodways, albeit cheekily, I found myself relating to this section as a way of talking to internalized and external biases against Chinese food. It also invited reflection on why, when reading this menu, I felt a bit of pride or empowerment through this arguably very problematic framing of "civilization vs. barbarity." This reflection can encourage me to think more critically about how the feelings and memories aspects of these documents stir and shape the ways I use documents within the histories I write. Menus, I believe, uniquely encourage these kinds of reflections, which are invaluable lessons in recognizing the importance of the relationships that historians forge with their primary sources.

The historian can also find subtler stories in how the dishes are presented and organized. The dominance of Chinese dishes on the menu obviously reinforces Lichee Garden's broader storytelling and exaltation of Chinese food; however, the inclusion of non-Chinese categories like Salads and Tender Steaks, along with sides like French-fried potatoes and bread and butter, suggests that those who did not truly want to try Chinese food and were maybe brought there by a colleague or friend were still welcome at Lichee Garden. There is also a story of "freshness" peppered throughout the menu, through the names of dishes like "Fresh Vegetable Chop Suey," "Fresh Shrimp Chop Suey," and "Fresh Shrimp Egg Foo Young." This story of freshness is clearest in the category "Sea Foods in Season," where ten out of twenty-five dishes include the word "fresh" and the notion of seasonality in the category name reinforces a sense of freshness. Here we can consider how and why the restaurateurs behind Lichee Garden mobilized this sense of freshness, for example, perhaps it was to assuage worries about seafood or to fight stereotypes of Chinese cuisine or of Chinatown.

Marginalia features prominently on the menu cover in the form of penciled signatures scattered around the centre design. The words "Christmas Party" are scribbled near the top, letting us know the history of this specific menu and broadly signaling that, at least with this menu, Lichee Garden was successful in hosting at least one banquet. Notably for the historian, a date is included amongst the names, which helps us date the menu to at least one meal held on December 20th, 1955. Closer examination of the names, for example, could yield more historical rabbit holes to jump into, but, from the menu alone, we can begin to get a sense of the festive atmosphere Lichee Garden could hold.

Comparisons to other Lichee Garden menus further our insights into the life and life course of the restaurant. The Robert Bon Lee Collection contains a few menus from Lichee Garden, such as a luncheon menu and a late-night "Tid-Bit" menu (Lichee Garden, n.d.). Although these menus are not dated, their price points are similar to the 1955 menu and the address included on both menus is the same as the one listed in 1955. Other details from these menus may suggest that they are from a different time, perhaps a bit newer, since some dishes not on the 1955 menu are featured (e.g., dishes with Romanized Chinese names like Harr Pin and Choi Fah as well as "Korean Shrimp" and "Mongolian Beef"). The Luncheon menu also announces that it is new and emerged "by special request of our many patrons," and the Tid-Bit Platter menu states that it emerged “after several months of experimentation by our Master Chefs.” By expanding the scope of menu analyses, we can begin to trace how Lichee Garden grew with its patrons, offering them a place for lunch deals as well as a place for “the after-theatre gourmet.” Through these different types of menus, the historian can begin to flesh out some of what might have happened during the many hours of work and eating between eleven a.m. and five a.m. Politicians and those in business might have networked over a Lichee Garden lunch special, and Toronto cultural elite may have watched a show in the neighbouring theatres on a Friday before having a “tid-bit” feast until the early hours of Saturday morning. By closely reading the menu, we start to get a sense of the many and changing rhythms of the restaurant during its day-to-day operation, as well as its evolution relative to neighbouring establishments.

I conclude this menu analysis with a menu comparison to a take-out menu dated approximately to the 1990s, towards the end of Lichee Garden’s run (Lichee Garden, 1998). The address on this menu reflects the restaurant’s move away from downtown, and the hours that now only go to midnight suggest that Lichee Garden was no longer a late-night spot for post-theatre parties. Some of this menu retains notable details from the 1955 menu, such as the bamboo and lichee frame around the restaurant name and the desire to host banquets, as well as some of the dishes and dish categories (e.g., “Eggs in Oriental Fashion” and “Chop Suey” remain, although both have less than half of the dishes from 1955 in the 1990s menu). The 1990s menu also includes new categories, such as “Hot and Spicy Specialties” and “Sweet & Sour Varieties.”

Perhaps the most important shift to note is in the different stories these menus tell. While the types of menus are different, the 1990s menu contains significantly less educational information than the menu from 1955, and instead presents Lichee Garden as “A Toronto Tradition” that for “Over 50 years” has been “Specializing in Chinese Cuisine.” Lichee Garden here is no longer primarily a pathway or bridge between Toronto diners and an imagined China, but is rather firmly placed within Toronto as a local institution. Rather than highlighting the expertise of its chefs or their knowledge of China, the 1990s menu invokes an authenticity or value through the restaurant’s history in Toronto. Furthermore, details like the inclusion of “FREE Home Delivery” and the absence of dishes like Filet Mignon suggest a shift from fine dining towards comfort food. Through this menu comparison, we catch a glimmer of how Lichee Garden aged from a place courting the social elite to a Chinese Canadian cultural institution imbued with comfort and nostalgia.

This menu analysis is not meant to portray a comprehensive history of Lichee Garden; however, analyzing Lichee Garden menus with this method allows us to outline the life course of the restaurant and points to the many and diverse types of relationships forged at Lichee Garden. This analysis reveals how Lichee Garden transformed from a more formal, sit-down Chinese establishment into a “Chinese Canadian” takeout “Toronto Tradition” restaurant, as well as offering glimmers into what this transformation might have meant. It also shows the longevity of certain Chinese dishes and how those dishes moved from being considered authentically “Chinese” to “Chinese Canadian” over time. At the root of this analysis is the illumination of some of the many ways Lichee Garden addressed and grew with its diners. From the signatures to the recurrence of the word “fresh” on the 1955 menu, details on these menus open up “research rabbit holes” that could inspire oral history projects into the party scene at restaurants like Lichee Garden; other details reveal how Lichee Garden reimagined the status of Chinese cuisine vis-à-vis Western cuisines. While reading a large variety of primary sources will continue to expand and enrich the history of restaurants like Lichee Garden, giving menus the time and unique attention they deserve can begin to answer many more historical questions than one might assume, and this can open up new lines of inquiry that might otherwise be disregarded.

The secrets of menus: A conclusion

Most menus will likely never find their way into an archive, and some of them may challenge the method presented in this article. For example, some restaurants have built-in menus painted on their walls or illuminated in signs above the counter that are too large or cumbersome for most archives or museums to even consider preserving in their limited physical space. Digital menus are becoming more and more commonplace, but, to my knowledge, there are no formal ways of preserving these documents beyond the limits of an individual or restaurant maintaining their websites and therefore their reliance on commercial servers. The menus that food and restaurant historians might have the most interest in and questions about are the *secret* menus that worked beyond the physical pages of menus and emerged through the personal verbal relationships between restaurateur, chef, and diner. These menus would be at the heart of the kind of historical interactions this menu methodology hopes to recover; however, they leave arguably the thinnest trace within our archival records. This is where this primary source methodology could grow along with other historical and interdisciplinary methods, for example oral history or literary analysis, which could help us further understand the lives behind these menus. There are many secret menus that have been lost to the past that may have told more thorough histories, but perhaps we can keep developing our historical tools to recover some of the dynamics these secret menus may have left behind within the less secret ones. Perhaps, then, the next task will be about thinking carefully and expansively when considering where we might find menus and how we might help archivists preserve them.

This methodology presents four steps to navigate the hidden and connective histories held within menus. As shown above, it posits that we have to begin with an open mind in order to identify as much as we can and cannot, rather than instantly diving directly into the multiple rabbit holes and stories these documents tell. From step one to step four, this method attempts to navigate the pointedness and expansiveness of these documents, where menus, with their often-terse language and lists, need a little more time and attention to uncover the multiple connections and stories they reveal. It is in this blending of concise utilitarianism and world-building/storytelling where menus push us to take an equally blended approach in our historical analysis.

As prompted at the beginning of this article, underlying this method is a challenge to the historian to personally connect to these documents, as they encourage us to do. This challenge aims to encourage a posture or stance that is better able to engage the blended-ness of menus. This way we can avoid taking the stories or dishes presented only at face value through considering how our relationships to these documents can evolve and, in turn, reveal different insights into the past. It is my hope that this method is an invitation for historians to order off these menus, not only once but multiple times, as if they were from our favourite restaurant. It is through creating relationships with these documents that we can better understand and care for the many moments they have witnessed.

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Appendix: Selected list of American and Canadian menu collections

Note: these collections feature menus from around the world.

Bloomsbury Food Library:

- Illustrated Menu Collection: 1830-1951 www.bloomsburyfoodlibrary.com/article?docid=b-9781350934351&tocid=b-9781350934351-001

Colorado College:

- Colorado Menus Collection https://libraryweb.coloradocollege.edu/library/specialcollections/Colorado/Menus.html

Seattle Public Library:

- Seattle Room Menu Collection https://cdm16118.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16118coll5

University of Houston:

- Shamrock Hilton Conroy Collection https://digitalcollections.lib.uh.edu/catalog?f%5Bprovenance_sim%5D%5B%5D=Shamrock+Hilton+Conroy+Collection&locale=en

New York Public Library

- What's on the menu? https://menus.nypl.org/about
- The Buttolph Collection of Menus https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-buttolph-collection-of-menus#/?tab=navigation
- W. Dieter Zander Menu Collection https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/w-dieter-zander-menu-collection#/?tab=about
- Soete Menu Collection Https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/soete-menu-collection#/?tab=about
- Baratta Menu Collection Https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/baratta-menu-collection#/?tab=about
- L'art Du Menuisier Https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/lart-du-menuisier#/?tab=about
- Les Arts Arabes: Architecture--menuiserie--bronzes--plafonds--revêtements--marbres--pavements--vitraux--etc. Avec Une Table Descriptive Et Explicative, Et Le Trait Général De L'art Arabe Https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/les-arts-arabes-architecture-menuiserie-bronzes-plafonds-revtements-marbres#/?tab=about
- Schomburg Menu Collection Https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/schomburg-menu-collection#/?tab=navigation
- Banquet Menus from Czarist Russia https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/banquet-menus-from-czarist-russia#/?tab=about

Culinary Institute of American Menu Collections

- Original CIA Menu Collection
- Seth Bradford and Edward S. Dewey Menu Collection
- Roland Chenus Menu Collection
- Craig Claiborne Menu Collection
- Roy Andries de Groot Menu Collection
- Herbert Ernest Menu Collection
- Greenebaum Menu Collection
- Auguste Guyet Menu Collection
- Bruce P. Jeffer Menu Collection
- George Lang Menu Collection
- Vinnie Oakes Menu Collection
- John Edward Oxley Menu Collection
- Chapman S. Root Menu Collection
- Jacob Rosenthal Menu Collection
- Smiley Family Menu Collection
- Lois Westfall Menu Collection

Northwestern University:

- Transportation Library Menu Collection https://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/transportation/collection/menu-collection.html
- Ira Silverman Railroad Menu Collection https://dc.library.northwestern.edu/collections/d3a8e587-cc58-4cb0-aea2-65465d42ec3e?Genre=%255B%2522menus%2522%255D&Location=%255B%2522Montreal%2522%255D

University of Toronto Scarborough Menu Collections:

- Harley J. Spiller Collection https://discoverarchives.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/harley-j-spiller-collection
- Robert Bon Lee Collection https://discoverarchives.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/robert-bon-lee-collection
- Brazilian Menu Collection https://discoverarchives.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/brazilian-menu-collection

University of Washington:

- Menu Collection https://content.lib.washington.edu/menusweb/index.html

Los Angeles Public Library:

- Menu Collection https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/lapl-indexes/menu-collection

Vancouver Island University:

- Imogene Lim Restaurant Menu Collection
  https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/2695

Arizona Historical Society:

- Menu Collection
  https://arizonahistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/library_Arizona-Menu-Collection.pdf

Cornell University:

- Menu Collection

https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMM
06452.html

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Original Research Article

A review of food asset maps in Canada

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Abstract

Food asset mapping is gaining prominence in Canada as an important planning tool for the evaluation of local food systems. In addition to being used by planners to identify opportunities for improved food security, food asset maps are also valuable references for sourcing food locally, particularly by people experiencing food insecurity. Seventy-three food asset maps were reviewed and categorized based on the types of food assets included as well as design characteristics. Built environment assets such as grocery stores and food banks were included in most maps, as were agriculture-based natural food assets like farms, community gardens, and orchards. However, representations of Indigenous-focused food assets and natural food assets that are not agriculture-based, such as forests, water bodies, and foraging areas, were generally lacking. The lack of representation of Indigenous perspectives on what is considered a food asset reinforces the values of a settler-colonial food system in food asset maps. The methods for food asset mapping therefore need to be changed from current quantitative practices that largely rely on secondary data sources led by governments and non-profit organizations to collaborative approaches that centre the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and other equity deserving groups.

Keywords: Food asset mapping; local food systems; food security; Canada; food system planning

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Résumé

La cartographie des ressources alimentaires gagne en importance au Canada en tant qu'outil de planification important pour l'évaluation des systèmes alimentaires locaux. En plus d'être utilisées par les planificateurs pour identifier les possibilités d'amélioration de la sécurité alimentaire, ces cartes sont aussi des références précieuses pour l'approvisionnement local, en particulier pour les personnes en situation d'insécurité alimentaire. Soixante-treize cartes de ressources alimentaires ont été examinées et classées en fonction des types de ressources et des caractéristiques de conception. L'environnement bâti, incluant les épiceries et les banques alimentaires, a été inclus dans la plupart des cartes, de même que les lieux d'agriculture d'aliments naturels, tels que les fermes, les jardins communautaires et les vergers. Cependant, les ressources alimentaires du point de vue des populations autochtones et celles d'origine naturelle qui ne sont pas issues de l'agriculture, telles que les forêts, les plans d'eau et les zones de cueillette, étaient généralement absentes. Le manque de représentation des perspectives autochtones sur ce qui est considéré comme une ressource alimentaire renforce les valeurs d'un système alimentaire colonial dans ces cartes. Les méthodes de cartographie doivent donc être modifiées et passer des pratiques quantitatives actuelles, qui reposent largement sur des sources de données secondaires gérées par les gouvernements et les organisations sans but lucratif, à des approches collaboratives qui tiennent compte des points de vue des peuples autochtones et d'autres groupes méritant d'être traités avec équité.

Introduction

Food insecurity is defined as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Health Canada, 2020, para. 1). In 2020, 11.2 percent of the Canadian population was food insecure (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This has been exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Idzerda et al., 2022). The negative impact of rising food prices due to record levels of inflation in 2022 also contributed to food insecurity, with 24 percent of Canadians reducing the amount of food they purchased and 7.1 percent skipping meals (Charlebois & Music, 2022). In fact, the highest prevalence of food insecurity in Canada (17.8 percent of households in the ten provinces) was recorded in 2022 (Li et al., 2023). Barriers to food access may be caused by income (McIntyre et al., 2016), lack of mobility (Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022), or the closure of important food spaces offering food services that community members rely upon (Higgins et al., 2021). These barriers also disproportionately affect racialized and Indigenous peoples (Grann et al., 2023; Mori & Onyango, 2023). The highest rates of food insecurity were reported by people who identify as Black (39.2 percent), Indigenous (33.4 percent), and Filipino (29.2 percent) living in the ten Canadian provinces in 2022 (Li et al., 2023). In contrast, 15.3 percent of people who identify as White experienced food insecurity (Li et al., 2023). Note that the data reported by Li et al. (2023) did not include Indigenous peoples on-reserve. According to data collected from 2008 to 2016, 47.1 percent of households on-reserve were food insecure (Batal et al., 2021). These high rates of food insecurity for Indigenous peoples, especially on-reserve, reflect structural disparities caused by hundreds of years of colonization by European settlers. Indigenous peoples were removed from their land, food sources, and culture. Ineffective food interventions for Indigenous peoples rooted in settler colonial ideologies persist to the present day (Robin (Martens) et al., 2022). Despite the presence of food insecurity, most local governments rarely consider food systems in urban planning. For example, a survey conducted by the American Planning Association found that only 1 percent of local governments view food systems issues as a priority (Raja, 2020). In Canada, a survey conducted with land use planners found that 67 percent of those surveyed (n=435) had no experience with food-related courses in their planning education (Hansen et al., 2021).

In the field of food systems planning, food asset mapping is one tool that has gained popularity in Canada to improve food security by identifying and characterizing the available resources in a municipality or region to better understand the local food system (Baker, 2018). Food assets are resources and infrastructure to support a local food system such as community gardens, urban agriculture, farmers' markets, food retail, food banks, community kitchens, and other organizations or programs related to food (Baker, 2018). Ways that food asset maps are used for food systems planning include tracking the number, density, and location of food assets, evaluating access (or lack of access) to food assets for vulnerable populations, identifying potential locations for programs and services, finding connections between food assets and food system stakeholders, and inform food policies (Baker, 2018; Pothukuchi, 2004). Moreover, food asset mapping has been identified as one of the tools that planners and policy makers can use for asset inventory and for food systems resiliency (Moore et al., 2022). Asset inventory can be used to better understand emergency responses and to facilitate food systems resilience planning through the identification of critical food assets that are needed for the food systems to function (Moore et al., 2022). According to Soma et al. (2022a), food asset mapping may include food assets that are critical for cultural food practices (both formal and informal), natural/ecological food assets, the built environment, and also social food assets. Through a community food asset mapping process, the study identified the importance of ensuring that the currently underrepresented voices and food of Indigenous communities are included in the mapping process (Soma et al., 2022a). When identifying food assets, it is imperative for planners, geographers, and policy makers to ask: "food assets for whom?"

While studies on food mapping in general have been conducted to understand disparities in the food system, as revealed through food access mapping and food desert mapping (Sweeney et al., 2016), there has been no study about the content and diversity of food asset maps that currently exist. Even though food asset maps have been created in multiple jurisdictions across Canada, amid growing calls to use this tool to improve food systems resiliency (Moore et al., 2022; Soma et al., 2022a) and food security (Baker, 2018), there has been a lack of research conducted on the content of the maps and the types of food assets that are included. Without understanding the nuances and types of assets included in food asset maps, it is unclear whether the maps include assets that are critical for local food system functionality. This review investigates the prevalence, quantity, type, and distribution of food assets and food asset maps across the country. Based on the norms in current food asset mapping practices, and several studies highlighting gaps in Indigenous voices in food asset mapping processes (Soma et al., 2022a; Soma et al., 2022b), our hypothesis is that food asset maps in Canada are dominated by built environment assets and lack consideration of Indigenous and natural assets.

Literature review

The practice and use of the term "food asset mapping" has become more prominent in the field of urban planning in Canada since being introduced by Baker (2018). However, the practice of participatory asset mapping has been employed since the 1990s to identify community assets and seek solutions to social issues, including food security (Lightfoot et al., 2014). Since asset mapping projects are largely based in communities and conducted by practitioners, they may not be documented extensively in research literature. Nonetheless, there are some Canadian examples of participatory asset mapping that included food assets from the 2010s (Fast & Rinner, 2018; Tudge, 2010).

While food asset mapping is used more commonly by planners in Canada, there are other food mapping techniques that serve similar objectives. "Food access" mapping is a common term in the U.S. for mapping the food assets within a municipality or region where access to healthy foods is lacking (Hubley, 2011; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; McKey et al., 2020). Food access mapping focusses directly on the built environment assets where food can be either purchased or obtained free of charge (e.g., retailers, food banks), in conjunction with natural assets such as community gardens where food is grown or produced (De Master & Daniels, 2019). "Foodshed mapping," characterizes natural assets in terms of estimating potential agricultural land and yields for food products (Hu et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2012). Another term used is "food system mapping," which characterizes a local or regional system as a whole and includes natural and built environment assets, as well as the linkages between them (Jensen & Orfila, 2021). For this review, the term food asset mapping will be used to encompass the various forms of mapping tools used to characterize food assets as identified by Baker (2018). The definition of food assets used by Baker (2018) is broad since it includes physical and non-physical assets that maintain food security for communities and regions. Examples of physical assets are farms, orchards, processors, distributors, retailers, community gardens, community kitchens, food banks, and waste management facilities (Baker, 2018). Examples of non-physical assets are food programs and services, funding, investment opportunities, and political support (Baker, 2018). While the definition does not explicitly exclude any food assets, these examples represent an agricultural, market-based food system worldview. Land-based and informal food assets were not included, nor were cultural food assets such as gathering spaces and places for transmission of traditional knowledge. Due to the broad definition of food assets, it is not clear how the concept of food assets is mobilized by organizations and municipalities that choose to develop food asset maps.

Quantitative methods are commonly used to populate food asset maps using secondary data sources such as municipal databases, census information, and food retailer listings (Baker, 2018; Hubley, 2011; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; McKey et al., 2020; Sweeney et al., 2016). While these types of maps provide a useful evidence-based tool for planning and decision making, there are limitations in their ability to represent the nuances and dynamics of the local food system. Quantitative data focusses mostly on the built environment and assets that can be spatially tracked (i.e., having an address or specific geographic location). They typically do not include traditional Indigenous ways of obtaining food such as foraging, hunting, and fishing, or non-market means such as personal gardening, livestock rearing, sharing, trading, and recovering food from waste (Hall et al., 2020; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; Soma et al., 2022a). In their current form, food asset maps can paint an incomplete picture of the local food system and reinforce existing negative assumptions and stigmas associated with communities that face greater food insecurity or rely more on traditional or non-market means of food provisioning (De Master & Daniels, 2019; Miewald & McCann, 2014; Soma et al., 2022a). Furthermore, the exclusion of food assets that are important for Indigenous peoples can reinforce the Eurocentric and colonial history of mapping, which was done to expand settlements and exert power while displacing Indigenous knowledge and experiences (Duncan, 2006; Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). Also known as “map tyranny,” it is important to be cautious about privileging the scientific worldviews of the map makers and scientists who develop maps (Duncan, 2006, p. 411). The omission of Indigenous values and worldviews in the practice of mapping perpetuates the dominant food system that is built on "the capitalist logic of the ceaseless expansion of production, consumption, and profit, and is fundamentally exploitative, wasteful, irrational, and inhumane to Indigenous Peoples and to society as a whole" (Bohunicky et al., 2021, p. 157). While qualitative methods such as surveys or focus groups, or the application of citizen science can augment secondary data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of local food systems, their application has been limited due to the large amount of time and resources needed for implementation (De Master & Daniels, 2019; Florian et al., 2016; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010; Soma et al., 2022a; Sweeney et al., 2016).

Besides their use as a planning tool, food asset maps can act as a source of information for people who are food insecure and are looking for affordable food options in their locality. For practitioners such as municipal governments and community organizations, food asset maps are indeed purposely created to assist people facing food insecurity (City of Calgary, 2022; Region of Peel, 2022; Vancouver Coastal Health, n.d.). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some local governments created asset maps to provide up-to-date information to residents on where they can find community resources, including food banks, food delivery services, meal programs, prepared meal distribution, community fridges, and low-cost markets (City of Toronto, n.d.; City of Vancouver, 2022). However, these maps do not appear to be regularly updated after the pandemic.

Methods

Food asset maps from Canada were identified by conducting web searches on Google, Google Scholar, and Simon Fraser University's online library catalogue for keywords in English and French, the two official languages of the country. The English keywords used were "food asset map," "food system map," "food access map," and "food map." The French keywords were "carte des ressources alimentaires," "carte du paysage alimentaire," and "carte alimentaire." These key words were paired with "Canada" and the names of each of the provinces and territories in Canada, as well as their acronyms, to narrow down the search results. If the province or territory names were not generating a sufficient quantity of search results, the major city names within each province and territory were also included in the search to find additional maps.

Indigenous food assets were given their own category and search because these assets have been identified as lacking in mainstream food systems planning (Soma et al., 2022a; Soma et al., 2022b). While there is also a lack of representation of other equity deserving groups in food systems planning, their food assets are found more within the built environment which is typically better represented in food asset maps. To search specifically for Indigenous food asset maps, the word "Indigenous" was added to the English keywords. As there are multiple terms for "Indigenous" in French, each of the following keywords was added to the two mapping keywords: "peuples indigènes," "peuples autochtones," and "indigene." Search results were reviewed to identify maps within Canada that were published on an interactive web mapping platform (e.g., Google Maps, ArcGIS) or as a static map that spatially depicts food assets (e.g., a PDF or image) that included at least one type of food asset. In some cases, search results led to links that did not work and those maps were not included.

Food assets on each map identified from the web search were categorized according to the definitions in Table 1 (Food asset categories). Built environment food assets are defined as food assets in human-made or modified structures. Conversely, natural food assets are defined as food assets outside of human-made or modified structures. Farms, gardens, and orchards are categorized as natural assets due to the asset predominantly occupying space that is not in a human-made or modified structure, although such structures may be appurtenant to the asset. Indigenous food assets are defined as food assets that are oriented towards use by Indigenous peoples and may include traditional foods or land-based foods and associated infrastructure (e.g., smoke houses for smoking fish) (Robin et al., 2021). These food assets are identified through the use of Nation names or other label cues in the map title or description that may refer to traditional foods, country foods, or Indigenous focussed foods. Note that natural food assets and Indigenous food assets are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as most natural food assets such as fishing, hunting, and foraging spaces are traditional food sources for Indigenous peoples (Robin et al., 2021).

Table 1: Food asset categories

Asset Type	Asset Category	Examples
Built Environment Food Assets	**Food charities**	Food banks, food aid, meal delivery services for vulnerable populations, community restaurants, soup kitchens, meal & snack services
	Schools	Educational programming, gardening & cooking workshops, schools
	Commercial grocers	Convenience stores, supermarkets, seasonal markets, grocers, public markets, specialty food stores
	Commercial dining	Restaurants, cafes
	Community organizations	Religious organizations, community centres, community health centres, family centres, collective kitchens, fridge sharing, seed libraries
	Free or low-cost grocery	Low-cost markets, food vouchers, mobile/curbside/pop-up markets, free grocery items, low-cost grocery items
	Built environment gardens	Greenhouses, rooftop garden, vertical farming
	Alternative markets	Farmer's markets
	Farms/gardens	Community gardens, urban farms, institutional gardens

Natural Food Assets	**Orchards**	Dedicated orchard space, wineries
	Water bodies	Lakes, rivers, shorelines
	Forests	Forested land
	Land forage	Berries, fruits, wild food stuffs, hunting
	Marine forage	Fishing
Indigenous Food Assets	**Indigenous food charities**	Food banks, food aid, meal delivery services for vulnerable populations, community restaurants, soup kitchens, meal & snack services
	Indigenous community organizations	Religious organizations, community centres, community health centres, family centres, collective kitchens, fridge sharing, seed libraries
	Indigenous schools	Educational programming, gardening & cooking workshops, schools
	Indigenous community grocers	Convenience stores, supermarkets, seasonal markets, grocers, public markets, specialty food stores
	Indigenous farms/gardens	Community gardens, urban farms, institutional gardens

Characteristics, including the map scale, urban/ruralness, map developer, and purpose were recorded and categorized per Table 2 (Characteristics of food asset maps). The map developer was categorized as the entity that is responsible for the production of the map content. For maps that were developed collaboratively with multiple types of stakeholders, the entity that appeared to be leading the project or having the most responsibility (e.g., keeping the map up to date) was recorded as the map developer. The map purpose was determined by inferring the primary intended use case for developing the map from the map's title, description, and other information that was available online (e.g., project web page). The URL for each map and date of publication or most recent revision at the time of reviewing the map were also recorded.

If there was at least one location on a map that fit in one of the food asset categories, then that food asset was considered to have been included on the map. The number of categories displayed on each map were summed together. The subtotals of categories for each province or territory and total categories in Canada were also tabulated.

Limitations

The food asset maps for this study were found via online keyword searches. Due to the many terms that are used to describe food asset mapping, a limitation of the study is that published food asset maps may not have been returned as results in the web search queries. Of the maps included in this study, only 12 percent contained the term "food asset map." For example, the map created for the Food by Ward project in Toronto (Toronto Public Health, 2018), which is considered the first large-scale, public, and web-based food asset map in Canada, is not called a food asset map. However, the term "food assets" was mentioned on the webpage of the map when it was still active. Since the term "food asset map" originated in Anglophone Canada and there is no equivalently used French term, it was particularly challenging to find maps from Francophone sources. In both English and French, searching more generally for "food map" and "carte alimentaire" was helpful for returning more search results, but doing so also increased the quantity of search results that contained irrelevant content.

An absence of Indigenous food assets tagged specifically as "Indigenous food assets" posed a challenge to this study. Indigenous keyword searches returned very few results. Poor identification of Indigenous food assets leaves the contributions of these assets to the food systems landscape under-evaluated and unacknowledged. For example, smokehouses are important food assets for many Indigenous communities to preserve meat such as salmon (MacTavish et al., 2012) and used for ceremonial purposes. However, this food asset is nowhere to be seen in any of the food asset maps (Lane, 2018).

Another limitation is that only maps that were publicly available online were included in the study. There are likely many more food asset maps that have been created and not published online. For example, participatory food asset mapping projects have been conducted in Canadian communities, but these maps were not published or no longer available (Fast & Rinner, 2018; Tudge, 2010). Paper maps may also exist and would not have been included.

Lastly, this study reviewed the types and categories of food assets included in food asset maps, but not the quality or completeness of the data. Maps varied widely in how many food assets were identified in a region. In some maps, data points were very sparsely distributed, and in others, they were very densely localized. Since this study did not include primary data collection, there were no means available to determine how many food assets were captured in the food asset maps compared to the actual number of food assets. Therefore, there is uncertainty as to whether food assets were representationally missing from maps or were just non-existent.

Results and discussion

Food asset map characteristics

The keyword search yielded a total of seventy-three food asset maps. See Appendix A for the list of maps. A summary of map characteristics is shown in Table 2. Most maps were on a municipal (55 percent) or regional (32 percent) scale and developed by non-profit organizations (44 percent) or government (41 percent). The municipal and regional scale of food asset maps is logical, since the non-profit organizations and government entities that create these maps also operate at that level, such as municipal or regional governments, regional health authorities, and community organizations.

Table 2: Characteristics of food asset maps

Characteristic	Category	Definition	Number of Maps	Percentage of Maps (%)
Map scale	Municipal	One city or town	40	55
	Regional	A county, a region, or more than one city or town	23	32
	Provincial/territorial	One province or territory	6	8
	Inter-provincial/territorial	More than one province or territory	4	5
Urban/ruralness	Urban	Within a census metropolitan area or census agglomeration (Statistics Canada, 2023)	30	41
	Rural	Outside of a census metropolitan area or census agglomeration (Statistics Canada, 2023)	6	8
	Rural/urban	Includes both rural and urban areas	37	51
Map developer	Government	Municipal, regional, or provincial government or entity (e.g., health authority, tourism board) that is connected to government	30	41
	Non-profit organization	Charity, community organization, association	32	44
	Research institution	University, college, research institute	9	12
	Business	Private business (includes those providing services on behalf of government)	1	1
	Unknown	Developer is not known	1	1
Purpose	Affordable food	Identify places with affordable food for people who are seeking these food sources	23	32
	Local food	Identify places where consumers can purchase locally produced or manufactured food and support local businesses	12	52
	Inventory	Identify all or certain types of food assets within a geography, which can be used for finding food sources/programs or assessing the food system	38	16

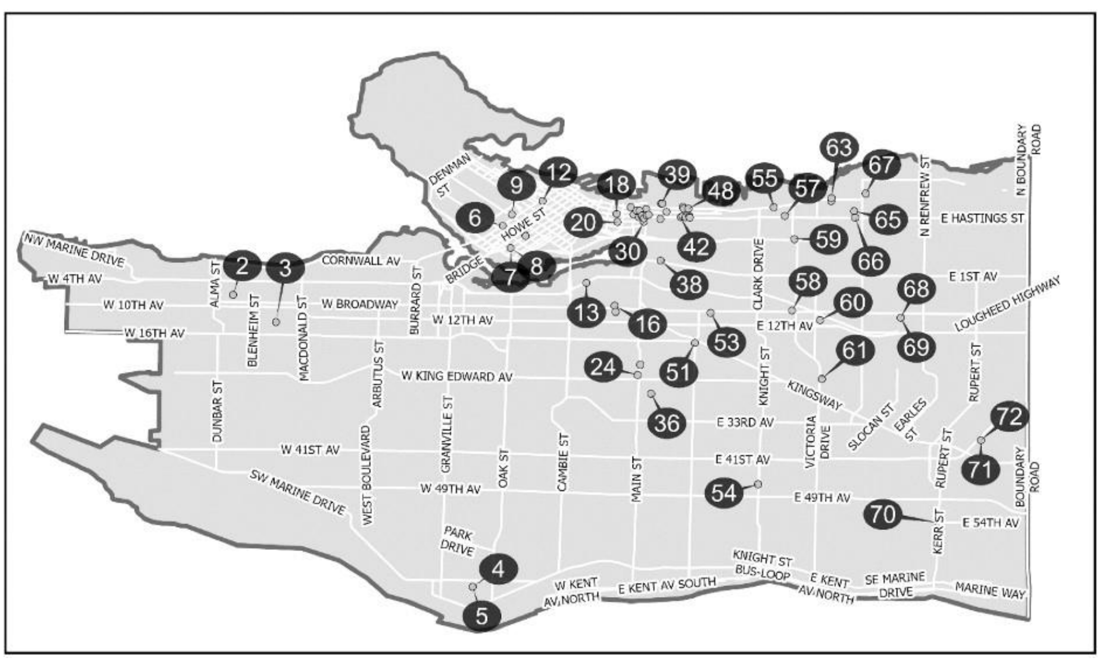
About half (51 percent) of maps had a mix of urban and rural areas, 41 percent featured urban areas only, and 8 percent included rural areas only. Urban areas consisted mostly of large cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas, such as Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Ottawa, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. With 73.7 percent of the population in Canada living in large urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2022a), it makes sense that there would be more food asset maps of urban areas. However, this may create a gap for representing food assets for Indigenous peoples. While close to half of the Indigenous population lives in large urban centres (44.3 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2022c), there is a larger proportion of Indigenous peoples living away from large urban centres compared to the overall population in Canada. Furthermore, many of the natural food assets that are important to Indigenous peoples are only available in rural areas, where land has not been privatized, habitats have not been removed or damaged by land development, and traditional food activities can still be practiced (Cidro, 2015; Grann et al., 2023; Russell & Parkes, 2018).

An interesting finding related to the map developers is that many maps were developed collaboratively between governments and non-profit organizations. These maps were usually featured on a governmental website as a service provided by the community, but non-profit organizations are responsible for updating the map data (and hence were considered the map developers). For example, on the Vancouver Coastal Health's (n.d.) Food Asset Maps website, the maps for Vancouver and Richmond were developed by municipal government and the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, and Squamish-Lillooet were developed by non-profit organizations. While it may be beneficial for non-profit organizations to fill gaps in services that governments are not able to fully provide, it also may reduce accountability of the government and could lead to an overreliance on non-profit organizations to develop these maps.

Around half (52 percent) of the maps were inventory maps and about one-third (32 percent) were affordable food maps. Food asset maps with a focus on affordability puts a priority on identifying categories such as free or low-cost grocers, food banks, and other food charities. Many of the inventory maps were multipurpose and could be used for finding affordable food and/or local food. Most maps were published on an interactive platform (77 percent). Interactive maps are easier to update regularly since new information or changes are available online after it has been added or edited. Non-interactive maps, on the other hand, typically require more lengthy publishing layout, so updates cannot be immediately reflected on these maps. However, non-interactive maps can be beneficial for users who are not as familiar with interactive maps. Non-interactive maps are also easier to print, so they can be provided to users who do not have access to a computer or smartphone. Some food asset maps were published as both an interactive and non-interactive map (Figures 1 and 2), such as the "Free and low-cost programs in Vancouver" map (City of Vancouver, 2022). The information is displayed on both maps is identical. The interactive map allows users to zoom in and view details by clicking on the icons. The non-interactive map is a print-ready, black-and-white letter-sized PDF, displaying locations as numbers that are associated with a list of locations and their details. Offering maps in both a web and print-friendly format can be beneficial for improving accessibility of information and appeal to the different preferences of users. This is especially important for affordable food maps, which users may be relying on to find their next meal.

Figure 1: Screenshot of "Free and low-cost programs in Vancouver" interactive (online) map (City of Vancouver, 2022)

Figure 2: Screenshot of "Free and low-cost programs in Vancouver" non-interactive (print-friendly) map (City of Vancouver, 2022)



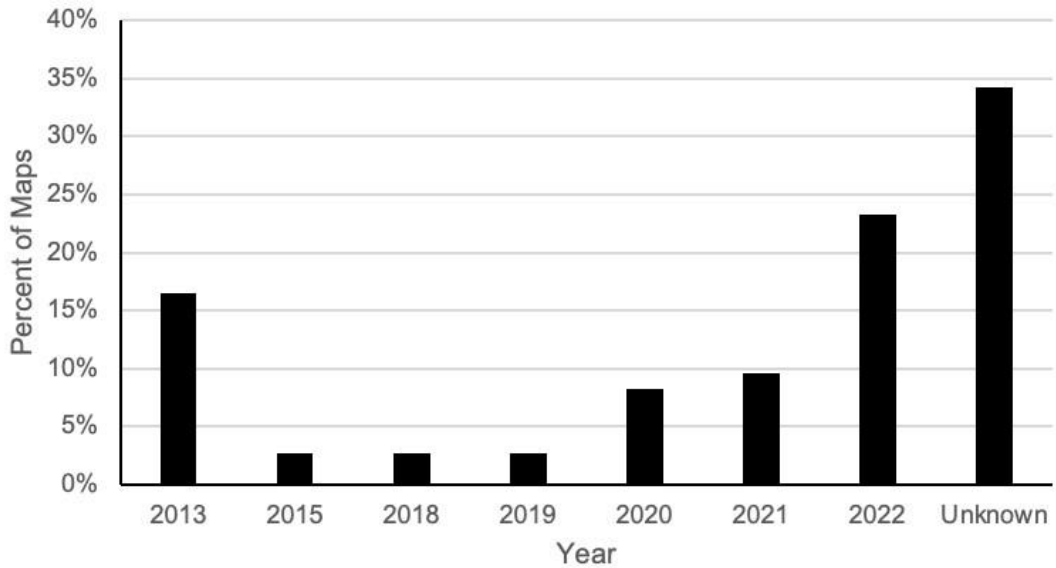
Google Maps was the most popular interactive map platform and was used for 45 percent of the maps. Google Maps is a free service and can be used with minimal training, which can be advantageous for map developers that have limited staff and/or financial resources. On the other hand, platforms such as ArcGIS, which have more advanced functionalities, require more technical knowledge and licensing fees. For the purposes of using maps to assess a food system, ArcGIS and other GIS-oriented platforms are advantageous since they have the capabilities to combine and analyze different types of spatial information such as the density or distances to food assets.

From a user-perspective, Google Maps is generally more intuitive and user-friendly because it has cross-platform functionality. For example, maps made on Google Maps can be opened in a web browser or within the Google Maps app on a smartphone, which is already a commonly used app for navigation. A user can click on an icon on a food asset map and then receive directions to navigate to that location (Figure 3). Other interactive maps do not have this level of smartphone integration and therefore are not as easy to use for navigating to a food asset. One downside of interactive web maps is that they may not be accessible for people who do not have a smartphone with an Internet connection.

A publication date was available for 64 percent of the maps and 23 percent were updated in 2022, the year when this review was conducted (Figure 4). The publication date was not available or could not be inferred for 34 percent of the maps. For map users, it is useful to know when maps were published, especially if they are relying on the information on the map to locate food assets. Out-of-date information can reduce the credibility of the map and lead users to stop using the map because they cannot trust that the information is correct.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the NB Food Programs map on a smartphone (Food for All NB, 2022)

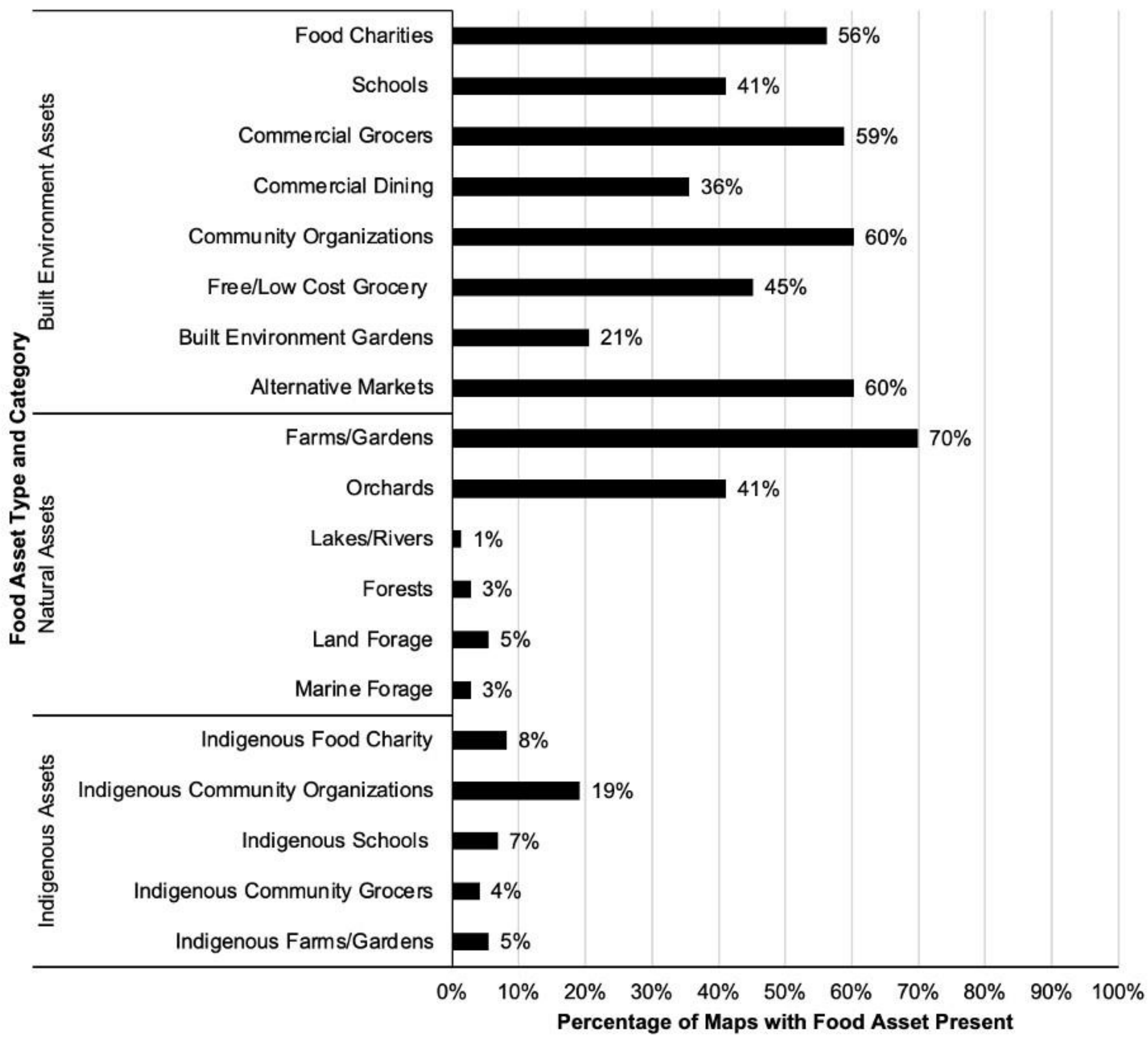
Figure 4: Year of publication of food asset maps



Food asset map content

Almost all (95 percent) of the food asset maps contained at least one category of built environment food assets. The most prevalent built environment food asset categories were alternative markets (60 percent), community organizations (60 percent), commercial grocers (59 percent), and food charities (56 percent) (Figure 5). Data on built environment food assets is readily available online through sources such as web pages, business directories, and government databases. Built environment food assets also tend to have address locations so the process of geocoding is straightforward and can be done automatically by the mapping platform.

Figure 5: Prevalence of food asset categories on food asset maps



Natural assets were included in 71 percent of maps. Agricultural natural assets, including farms/gardens (70 percent) and orchards (41 percent) were the most prevalent in this category. Conversely, non-agricultural natural assets were largely absent from the available data sources. Farms/gardens and orchards, while categorized as natural assets, are similar to built environment assets in that they typically have address locations and have some form of registration (e.g., as a business or organization). In contrast, lakes/rivers, forests, land forage, and marine forage are not formally identified as food assets in most existing data sources. These food assets are important sources of traditional foods for Indigenous peoples. One feature of these types of natural food assets is that the locations may not be fixed. The areas may cross geographical boundaries and change over time. For example, wild game or fish may move through large geographic regions seasonally. Another issue with natural food assets is that their existence may not translate to accessibility. Even though

Indigenous peoples have called for return of land to Indigenous nations, governments have not done this in practice and settler control over lands and resources has been maintained (Kepkiewicz, 2017). Examples of settler control include privately owned land or requirements for licences or permits that prevent access to food sources in traditional territories (Grann et al., 2023). These natural assets may also no longer be available as food sources due to habitat destruction or pollution (Grann et al., 2023). All the food asset maps that were reviewed were made by non-Indigenous governments and/or organizations and mostly populated with secondary data from published sources. Knowledge about locations for land-based activities like hunting, fishing, and foraging are typically held within Indigenous communities, and therefore not published. There is concern that by identifying these natural food assets and making the information public that these assets will be exploited. However, recognition of these areas as food assets legitimizes their importance and could help make a case for preserving these areas, which may in turn improve food security for Indigenous peoples. Therefore, there is a tension between recognizing non-agricultural natural assets in food asset maps and ensuring that knowledge about these assets is not shared or used inappropriately.

Indigenous food assets were included in 22 percent of maps, with Indigenous community organizations being the most common category (19 percent). The lack of Indigenous food assets being reflected in Canadian food asset maps could be a result of these assets being a gap but could also be due to these food assets not being identified in available data sources, especially if the knowledge is kept within Indigenous communities.

Recommendations for food systems scholars

As more food asset maps are developed in Canada, both for planning and for locating local and/or affordable food options, this research shows that several gaps need to be addressed so these maps can better serve their purpose as an inventory or wayfinding tool. Currently, food asset maps generally appear to be developed as one-off projects or championed by community organizations rather than a service provided by local governments. Without regular updates and ongoing maintenance, the maps become less reliable for users. For planners, policy makers, and scholars, not having current information is also problematic because it may lead to decisions that are misaligned with community needs. Therefore, food asset mapping should be operationalized in local governments. Most local governments already have open data portals, so a food asset map could be a part of that, like the "Free and low-cost food programs" map made by the City of Vancouver (2022). The content of the food asset maps, which currently mostly focus on emergency and free or affordable food, can also be expanded. A food asset map can include other types of food assets that are often left out, but could be beneficial for improving food access, and added as layers or different sets of icons so a user can more easily filter for what they are looking for.

From a practical standpoint, it is understandable that a comprehensive map of all available food assets would require more resources. However, it is not necessary to create maps with an exhaustive inventory, but instead just have the maps be more relevant to the populations who will benefit most from them, like people who experience food insecurity. The added benefit of having better food security because people have better access to information on affordable food sources will likely outweigh the cost of developing and maintaining a food asset map.

Planners, policy makers, and scholars working on developing food asset maps also need to consider what type of information is prioritized and who should have access to the information on food asset maps that are publicly available. They also need to consider the colonial history of mapping led by governments, which have embedded colonial values into maps. To reclaim Indigenous food systems and challenge colonial worldviews, Indigenous communities are leading their own forms of participatory mapping (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). To decolonize the practice of food asset mapping, governments could support Indigenous communities to lead their own projects or co-develop projects together. Methods such as participatory food asset mapping can be used to examine the diverse values held within a community about their food environment (Jakes et al., 2015). A values-focussed asset mapping approach can support Indigenous resurgence by reflecting Indigenous values and worldviews in maps. This approach can also be an empowering exercise for other equity deserving groups to better reflect their values in food asset maps. The information in maps created through participatory asset mapping need to be carefully stewarded since they likely contain places of spiritual and cultural importance, such as harvesting sites for traditional foods. These could be exploited if the information became public. Therefore, a community may decide to keep the information on food assets within their community. This may limit the information that is accessible for research on food asset mapping (including this study). However, research should be of secondary importance because the primary objective of food asset mapping is to serve and honour the values of a community.

Having equity deserving groups take a leading or co-developing role in the mapping process can also help direct how food asset maps are designed and published so they are more user-friendly and accessible for target users. For example, some people may prefer maps on a mobile app so they can get real-time information while others may prefer paper maps if they do not have a mobile phone with a data plan. For food assets that may not have a fixed location and/or should not be revealed publicly (e.g., hunting, fishing, or foraging areas), one way that they can be represented is by showing a general area instead of a specific location. This contrasts with how geographical information is typically displayed in food asset maps, which is as individual points. However, the ability to draw polygons is a common feature of mapping software and is often used for other purposes (e.g., zoning), so it could also be used for depicting food assets.

Future research

Food asset mapping is a tool that can be utilized for the purpose of food assessment and is increasingly being identified as having the potential to contribute to efforts towards achieving food security and strengthening food systems resiliency (Baker, 2018; Soma et al., 2022a; Moore et al., 2022). The preliminary research from this study has given some insights on the characteristics of food asset maps and categories of food assets that are included in the maps. One limitation of this study is that data completeness or representativeness was not accessed. This gap could be filled in future research to triangulate the information provided in food asset maps with what is actually present. For example, a future study could conduct primary data collection on food assets within a community and compare it with what is shown in an existing food asset map of the same community. This type of comparison would provide a more detailed assessment of what types of food assets are represented or not.

Another area of future research is related to the user experience with food asset maps, specifically for food asset maps that act as a tool for people who experience food insecurity to find affordable food. This can be accomplished by leveraging user surveys and/or focus groups as a data collection technique. The findings from this type of study can improve the efficacy and utility of food asset maps by putting users at the centre and building maps based on their needs.

Conclusion

This is the first study to systematically understand the types and categories included in food asset maps developed across Canada. A total of seventy-three food asset maps were reviewed. Although varied, most food asset maps in Canada are dominated by built environment assets such as food banks or community centres, and generally lacked Indigenous-focussed food assets and natural food assets. By mapping food assets in this way, the dominant food system built on industrial agriculture and settler colonialism is reinforced. Considering that food insecurity disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples, the current method of food asset mapping is inadequate for representing food sources that are important for Indigenous peoples.

Most maps were interactive web maps (77 percent), of which the majority were built using Google Maps (45 percent), a free and user-friendly platform both for map makers and users. The publication date was not available or could not be inferred for 34 percent of the maps. This is problematic for confirming accuracy of the information since it may have changed since the time of publication. This poses a challenge for developing a baseline for food systems resiliency as it is unclear how many food assets are still in operation or active. While most maps are jointly developed by governments and non-profit organizations, the responsibility of updating maps largely falls on non-profit organizations that may not have regular funding or resources for maintaining the maps. Nevertheless, the existence of food asset maps in most of the large urban centres where nearly three-quarters of the population of Canada resides is an important first step for planners and policy makers to help community achieve food security. However, since approximately half of Indigenous peoples reside in rural areas and many food assets that are traditional food sources can only be found in rural areas, the lack of food asset maps focussed on rural areas creates another gap for Indigenous representation.

What is needed now is more resource mobilization to expand food asset maps and keep them up to date. The resources should be prioritized so the maps are relevant and user-friendly for people who experience food insecurity, as they may rely on these maps for locating sources of free or affordable food. This can be done by co-developing food asset maps with people who experience food insecurity, so the maps are based on their values. They can identify what types of food assets are important to them and how they prefer to access the information (e.g., paper map, website, mobile app). It is also important to consider what type of information should be available on publicly accessible maps to prevent exploitation of food assets, such as hunting, fishing, and foraging areas for Indigenous peoples. At the same time, recognizing these assets in food asset maps could also contribute to their preservation.

Although this study focussed on a descriptive approach to identifying different types of food assets and the categories included, deep analysis of why certain assets was included and how the food asset maps were developed was beyond the scope of the investigation. Further research on the specific content of food asset maps would give a better assessment of what is being represented and what is missing from food asset maps. Additionally, studies on the user experience with food asset maps could improve their efficacy and utility. Future researchers should take an increasingly comprehensive and systemic assessment of food assets and ensure that the process and methods that go into developing food asset maps are transparent and inclusive.

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Original Research Article

Balancing acts: Unpacking mothers' experiences and meanings of school lunch packing

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Abstract

While Canadian policy makers are considering expanding school food programs in Canada, parents remain primarily responsible for packing lunches. Although women perform disproportionate amounts of foodwork, including feeding their children on school days, little research has investigated mothers' experiences of packing school lunches in Canada. Drawing on fourteen interviews with mothers of elementary-aged children in British Columbia, this study explored how mothers experience and make meaning of packing school lunches. Mothers described lunch packing largely as an individualized responsibility for children's nutritional health and general wellbeing. Mothers strived to enact largely unattainable ideals about packing a "good" school lunch and engaged in diverse forms of physical, mental, and emotional labour to do so. When mothers were perceived to fall short of these elusive lunch packing ideals, mothers judged themselves and other mothers, and they also reported feeling scrutinized by other parents, teachers, and their children. While assuming the bulk of labour related to school lunch work, mothers also forged connections with their children through lunch packing, which they viewed as emotionally meaningful and a symbol of their care, love, and parental responsibility. These findings show that mothers' experiences with lunch packing are complex and wrapped up in notions of "good" mothering and feeding ideals. For mothers, a "balanced" lunch requires not only a nutritionally adequate meal but also involves balancing various forms of labour and contradictory emotions about foodwork. Understanding mothers' experiences of lunch packing is pivotal for successfully developing

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school food programs that meet the complex expectations of Canadian families.

Keywords: School lunch; lunch packing; foodwork; carework; mothering; parental perceptions

Résumé

Alors que les décideurs politiques canadiens envisagent d'élargir les programmes d'alimentation scolaire au Canada, les parents sont encore les principaux responsables de la préparation des lunchs de leurs enfants. Bien que les femmes effectuent un nombre disproportionné de tâches alimentaires, y compris veiller à l'alimentation de leurs enfants durant leurs journées à l'école, peu de recherches ont porté sur l'expérience des mères en matière de préparation des dîners pour l'école au Canada. S'appuyant sur 14 entrevues avec des mères d'enfants d'âge primaire en Colombie-Britannique, cette étude a exploré la façon dont les mères vivent la préparation des repas pour l'école et y donnent un sens. Les mères ont décrit la préparation des repas en grande partie comme une responsabilité individuelle vis-à-vis de la santé nutritionnelle et du bien-être général de leurs enfants. Elles s'efforçaient d'appliquer d'inatteignables idéaux concernant la préparation d'un « bon » repas pour l'école et s'engageaient dans diverses formes de travail physique, mental et émotionnel pour y parvenir. Lorsque les mères étaient perçues comme n'atteignant pas ces idéaux inaccessibles, elles se jugeaient elles-mêmes et jugeaient les autres mères ; elles ont aussi déclaré se sentir surveillées par les autres parents, les enseignants et leurs enfants. Tout en assumant la majeure partie du travail lié à la préparation des repas pour l'école, les mères ont également tissé des liens avec leurs enfants à travers ces tâches, ce qu'elles considéraient comme émotionnellement significatif et comme un symbole de leur attention, de leur amour et de leur responsabilité parentale. Ces résultats montrent que les expériences des mères en matière de préparation des repas sont complexes et s'inscrivent dans des notions de « bon » maternage et dans des idéaux en matière d'alimentation. Pour les mères, non seulement un lunch « équilibré » exige une qualité nutritionnelle adéquate, mais il implique aussi de trouver un équilibre entre diverses formes de travail et des émotions contradictoires concernant les tâches liées à l'alimentation. Il est crucial de comprendre l'expérience des mères quant à la préparation des lunchs si l'on veut concevoir avec succès des programmes d'alimentation scolaire qui répondent aux attentes complexes des familles canadiennes.

Introduction

Canadian children consume approximately one third of their total daily calories at school on weekdays (Tugault-Lafleur et al., 2017). Regardless of socio-demographic background, very few Canadian children meet national dietary recommendations either during or outside of school hours (Garriguet, 2007; Tugault-Lafleur et al., 2019). While recent estimates suggest that up to one in five Canadian students accesses some kind of free school breakfast, snack, or lunch (Ruetz & McKenna, 2022), Canada has been an outlier among wealthy countries, having no publicly funded national school food program (Koc & Bas, 2012). Parents are largely responsible for feeding children, who mostly eat school lunches and snacks brought from home (Carbone et al., 2018; Tugault-Lafleur et al., 2017). Yet, families across the socioeconomic spectrum report barriers to provisioning healthy school meals, including affordability, children's preferences, and time scarcity (Bauer et al., 2012; Engler-Stringer, 2009; Hawthorne et al., 2018; O'Rourke et al., 2020; Slater et al., 2012; Verdun, 2015).

Despite ongoing calls for upstream policy changes, including expansion of school meal programs to increase access to healthy food for children (Black et al., 2024; Hernandez et al., 2018; The Coalition for Healthy School Food, n.d.), Canadian strategies largely focus on parental responsibilities and feeding behaviours. For example, Canada's food guide (Government of Canada, 2021) and guidance from provincial governments and health authorities provide recommendations for improving parents' food skills to better nurture children's eating habits (HealthLink BC, 2017; Vancouver Coastal Health, 2020). Parent-focused media articles also commonly cultivate discourse on packing "healthy" or "perfect" school lunches (e.g., CBC News, 2012; Ross, 2019; Van Resendaal, 2020).

Framing mothers' school lunch packing as foodwork

Foodwork, which includes planning, shopping, preparation, cooking, and managing family eating experiences (Valentine, 1999), has historically been performed primarily by women. Feeding children has long been conceptualized as a principal component of mothering (DeVault, 1991), and women in North America continue to disproportionately perform foodwork (Beagan *et al.*, 2008; Koch, 2019; O'Connell & Brannen, 2016) and shoulder the expectations, pressures, judgements, stigmas, and emotional strain of feeding families (Beagan et al., 2008; Bowen et al., 2014, 2019; Cairns & Johnston, 2015; DeVault, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Oleschuk, 2020). Women remain responsible for "the mental and manual labour of food provisioning" (Allen & Sachs, 2007, p.1) as part of the "second shift" at home, often following other paid work outside the home (Hochschild, 1989). But mothers' foodwork is not simply work. It is a way of performing femininities and classed notions of "good" mothering and child rearing (Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Cappellini et al., 2018; O'Connell & Brannen, 2016; Ristovski-Slijepcevic et al., 2010).

Mothers in neoliberal societies are deemed responsible for teaching their children to "eat right" and protecting children's current and future health through individual consumer choices and feeding practices (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Patico, 2020; Power, 2016). Scholars have described how mothers are positioned as "guardians of health" (Beagan et al., 2008) or "the moral and physical guardians of the next generation" (Burman & Stacey, 2010, p.229), and health interventions often target mothers as foci of health education and behaviour change (e.g., Amend, 2018; Gruber & Haldeman, 2008; Lindsay et al., 2006). Neoliberal ideology places responsibility for health on the individual and emphasizes privatized market solutions to social problems, increasing parental expectations and pressures around feeding. This intensified what Hays (1996) coined "intensive mothering," an approach that is "child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive" (p.8). Intensive mothering ideology constructs the "good mother" as one who is "selflessly devoted to her children and who expends substantial resources, time, and emotional labour toward their nurturing and development" (Cairns & Johnston, 2015, p.69). Lareau's (2011) work reveals class distinctions, showing that middle- and upper-middle-class parents adopt "concerted cultivation," which views child rearing as a project, reflects middle-class ideals of good mothering, and entails financially- and labour-intensive approaches to inculcate children with specific tastes, habits, and skills. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus explains how different class backgrounds produce different tastes, habits, and preferences, and theorizes that middle-class socialization involves raising children who embody "good taste." North American research finds that middle-class parents in particular, motivated by concern for health, make efforts to socialize their children into a habitus of "good," diverse, and sophisticated tastes through concerted cultivation and intensive feeding practices (e.g., Backett-Milburn et al., 2010; Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Patico, 2020; Wills et al., 2011). Previous research on the practical, moral, and emotional aspects of mothers' foodwork (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Graham et al., 2021; Oleschuk, 2020; Patico, 2020; Ristovski-Slijepcevic et al., 2010; Slater et al., 2012; Wills et al., 2011) finds that the weight of perceived personal responsibility for children's health, body size, and nutrition outcomes can result in feelings of anxiety, shame, self-blame, and frustration for mothers across different social classes who struggle to live up to elusive feeding ideals (e.g., Bowen et al., 2019; Brenton, 2014; Cairns & Johnston; 2015; Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Friedman, 2015; Patico, 2020; Wright et al., 2015).

Research aims

While most Canadian children rely on school lunches packed at home, little is understood about how mothers of elementary school-aged children experience and make meaning of this foodwork in a society that places responsibility for children's feeding and nutrition on parents, and on mothers in particular. Therefore, this study explored mothers' experiences, perceptions, and meanings of school lunch packing.

Methods

Participants were recruited primarily through school- and parenting-related social media groups in a suburban school district in British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province, where a new district-wide school lunch program was recently introduced (in 2019). Parents or primary caregivers to at least one child in kindergarten through grade five in the school district of interest were eligible to participate. Parents of children in this age range were prioritized as parents of elementary school-aged students play a significant role in making decisions about school lunch and are more actively involved compared to parents of older children, but they have received little empirical research attention in Canada. An online screening survey determined participants' eligibility. Eligible participants were contacted by email with study information, consent forms, and interview scheduling details. While study recruitment was open to parents of all gender identities (as well as all ethnicities, household compositions, and ages), all participants identified as women. Thus, our initial focus on parents shifted to mothers, aligning with existing literature about the gendered nature of foodwork. Ethics approval was granted by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

An interview guide was developed based on relevant concepts from the literature and emerging findings from related research about this school district's lunch program (Black et al., 2020; Elliott & Black, 2020). The guide was refined based on insights from three pilot interviews (data from which were not included in the analysis) and as data collection and analysis ensued. Interviews opened with an introduction to the study, described as a study about parents' experiences and perceptions of school lunch and the school meal program in their children's schools. Upon obtaining active consent, questions were asked about participants' children (*e.g., Can you tell me a little bit about them? How would you describe them as eaters?)*, then about lunches their children eat at school, the lunch packing process, factors considered in making decisions about lunch, challenges they face packing lunch, and how they feel about lunch packing (*e.g., Can you tell me what your kid(s) had for lunch today (or yesterday/the last school day)? Can you walk me through the process of deciding what they would have for lunch? In your opinion, what is an ideal lunch during the school week for your kids? Can you give me an example of a time you felt it was really challenging to provide lunch for your child(ren)? How do you think your experiences with feeding your kids lunch during the school week compare to other parents and families?*). Additional questions focused on the school lunch program in their children's schools and opinions about school food programs more generally. Questions were posed in a semi-structured manner and were interspersed with probing and follow-up questions, aiming for in-depth understanding, illuminating meanings, and contextualizing parents' experiences with lunch packing and school lunch. Interviews concluded with closed-ended demographic questions.

After each interview, initial insights and emerging themes were documented in interview sketches, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, pseudonyms were assigned, and all potentially identifying information was removed from transcripts. Data were collected until saturation, where conceptual themes and categories were well defined and no new relevant information emerged. Fourteen interviews lasting one to two hours each took place over Zoom or telephone in English between October 2020 and May 2021.

Three transcripts were read closely and coded line-by-line (Charmaz, 2014) by hand. Initial codes from line-by-line coding were organized into broad coding categories to form the coding framework used to code all transcripts in NVivo 12. This article focuses on findings related to school lunch packing from focused coding (Charmaz, 2014; Emerson et al., 2011) of the following codes: FOODWORK, HEALTHNUTRITION, IDEALS, STIGMAJUDGEMENT, RESPONSIBILITY, EMOTIONS, and PARENTING, and it represents patterns of commonality and differences in the data. Member checking was conducted at two points. First, transcripts were verified by three participants (all other participants declined to review transcripts). Second, a summary of findings was shared with all participants following analysis. Half (n=7) of the participants provided feedback on the summary findings via a brief online survey. Analysis of this feedback is integrated into the findings and discussion.

The first author undertook data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis independently, with discussion and feedback from the second author and other research team members; thus, the lead author's positionality as a mixed-race and mixed-class woman with no children could have influenced data collection and analysis in a more significant way than if multiple researchers collected and analyzed data simultaneously. The second author's positionality is shaped by her experience as a parent of school-aged children, chiefly responsible for school-lunch packing, with socio-demographic similarities that overlap with many of this study's participants.

Findings

Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics (n=14), which included mainly white (n=12) participants and one participant each identifying as Middle Eastern and Punjabi. All identified as female between thirty-two to forty-seven years old (mean 39.3) and had between one to three children (median=2; mode=2), with at least one child in kindergarten through grade five attending a school in the school district of interest. The estimated 2016 median annual income for one family households of this city was $90,000 CAD, based on the most recent census data available at the time of data collection. Just over three quarters of participants self-identified as lower- to upper-middle-class (n=11), while eight participants had household incomes between 75% and 200% of the city's median income. Three participants had household incomes in the low-income category (0% to 75% median), and two participants had household incomes greater than 200% of the median income but self-identified as middle- or upper-middle-class. All participants completed high school, and eleven completed Bachelor or graduate degrees. Just under half of participants (n=6) were employed full-time in paid work outside the home, and approximately one quarter (n=4) were employed part-time. Four participants were either looking for work, keeping house or raising children full-time, or a combination thereof. The majority of participants (n=10) lived with male partners, while two were single mothers, one lived with a female partner, and one lived with her husband and extended family in a household with seven total adults. The participants' children attended six different elementary schools within the same school district that had recently introduced a district-wide school lunch program available to all students and staff, cost-shared, and subsidized for families in need (Black et al., 2020; Elliott & Black, 2020). Most participants packed school lunches regularly, with only two participants ordering from the lunch program daily (including one who received a subsidy to participate in the program), three who participated one to two times over the past month, and nine who had not ordered from the lunch program at all in the past month. As such, lunch packing was the primary way that participants in this study fed their children lunch during the school day, and thus this was the focus of this article.

Table 1: Characteristics of study participants (N=14)

Characteristic	n	%
Ethnicity/Ethnic origin[1]		
White	12	86
Middle Eastern	1	7
Punjabi	1	7
Household income[2]		
Less than $45,000	3	21
$45,000 - $67,499	1	7
$67,500 - $89,999	0	0
$90,000 - $134,999	7	50
$135,000 - $180,000	1	7
More than $180,000	2	14
Class identity[3]		
Poor/Low income/Working class	3	21
Lower-middle-class	1	7
Middle-middle-class	8	57
Upper-middle-class	2	14
First language		
English	12	86
Other	2	14
Immigration status		
Born in Canada	11	79
Established Immigrant (>5 years)	1	7
Recent Immigrant (<5 years)	2	14
Education		
Some College	2	14
Technical College Degree/Certificate	1	7
Bachelor's Degree	3	21
Master's Degree	6	43
PhD	2	14
Employment Status[4]		
Employed full-time	6	43
Employed part-time	4	29
Looking for work	2	14
Keeping house or raising children full-time	4	29

[1] Participants responded to "In your own words, how would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic origin?"
[2] Participants selected one of six options: Poor (<50% median), Working class (50-75% median), Lower-middle-class (75-100% median), Middle-middle-class (100-150% median), Upper-middle-class (150-200%), and Upper class (>200% median). Income brackets were defined by the OECD and calculated from census data.
[3] Participants self-identified as Poor/Low-income/Working class, Lower-middle-class, Middle-middle-class, Upper-middle-class, or Upper-class
[4] 2 participants were both looking for work and keeping house or raising children full-time

Mothers' narratives showed that they experience and assign meaning to lunch packing in diverse, and sometimes conflicted, ways. As part of the broader work of raising their children, mothers simultaneously perceived and experienced lunch packing as individualized responsibility, diverse forms of labour and foodwork, and a source of judgement and scrutiny.

Responsibility to pack "good" lunches

Mothers described lunch packing as part of their parental responsibility to set their children up for proper development, academic performance and behaviour in school, and current and future health, wellbeing, and success. Identifying childhood as a foundational period when habits and preferences form, mothers saw providing nutritious lunches as a way they could, and should, foster children's optimal growth and development. Many identified meeting high nutrition standards as a requirement for packed lunches, and some discussed the important role of childhood diets in preventing future excessive weight gain. For example, Kristen made efforts to limit processed foods high in sugar and fats in packed lunches, concerned that they could "lead to obesity." Nadine discussed how starting kids off on a healthy eating regime could carry over into their future lives and help with the "problem with obesity."

Participants also expressed a sense of responsibility for providing a nutritious, filling meal during the school day to keep their children "fueled" and help them focus, learn, and behave properly in class. As Nicola said, "if you're not eating properly, you can't learn properly." Stacey described limiting the sugar content of her daughter's lunches to avoid triggering behavioural issues in class:

> I don't want her to have a chocolate chip cookie at lunch, and then be acting like that and get sent in the hall. I'm sure they don't send kids out in the hall anymore, but, you know, her teacher's going to call me and say oh, Julia was really angry this afternoon and having burstouts. And I don't want that.

Mothers also described lunch packing as an opportunity to set an example of healthy eating and to help children develop healthy food skills, habits, and dispositions. When Jolie described her efforts to pack a balanced meal, she emphasized the importance of limiting packaged foods because "I just want [my daughter] to develop healthy eating skills." Sophia, on the other hand, includes small "treats" in her son's lunches to teach him about portion control. Despite their differing approaches to packing treats, Sophia and Jolie both demonstrate how lunch packing practices are informed and motivated by their sense of responsibility to cultivate their children's healthy eating habits and behaviours.

In line with scholarship on ways parents navigate pressures of feeding children in contexts that increasingly place responsibility for health on the individual (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2022; Patico, 2020; Power, 2016; Oleschuk, 2020), participants' narratives suggest that they perceive lunch packing as means to take personal responsibility for their children's health and wellbeing. While some discussed the roles of schools and governments in filling gaps where families were not able to provide lunch, the responsibility of cultivating health and habitus through feeding children, and through lunch packing more specifically, was primarily discussed as an individual and private duty of parents, rather than that of the school, government, or public. As one mother said, "you can't not [pack lunch] because I have this responsibility. Like I just can't pawn it off on the school."

While the types of food packed were diverse, mothers commonly described the "ideal" lunch as "healthy," "balanced," and "well-rounded," including a variety of food groups, emphasizing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and containing homemade, minimally processed, and unpackaged foods that minimize waste and limit sugar. Many emphasized the desirability of fresh, organic, and local foods and deemed convenience and packaged foods "unhealthy" and inappropriate for packed lunches, with the exception of occasional or small "treats." Concomitantly, the ideal lunch was also described as appealing to children's preferences and needs, packing well in a lunch bag or box, and being eaten and enjoyed by the child:

> An ideal lunch? I guess something that has a kind of like a balanced, well-rounded lunch. So has the different food groups in it. And will give her energy to keep going throughout the day. Then, it would have stuff in it that we know she'll enjoy so that she doesn't like dread lunchtime or anything.

This kind of gold standard lunch reflects intensive parenting ideals which centre children's needs and desires and require parents' investment of resources, time, energy, knowledge, and skills. It reflects expert-guided notions of "healthy" eating, following official nutrition guidance such as Canada's food guide which emphasizes eating a variety of food groups and home cooked meals, limiting highly processed foods, and enjoying your food (Government of Canada, 2021). By describing the ideal lunch in this way, participants constructed the ideal mother as one who is caring, capable, and committed to providing such a lunch, one that skillfully manages time, money, food, and their family's needs and preferences to provide "good" lunches that cultivate "proper" development and health. Such ideals were commonly contrasted with mothers' realities, in which several factors, most notably time limitations and children's food preferences, made these feeding and mothering ideals largely unattainable. Yet, mothers made significant efforts to enact them through diverse forms of labour.

Lunch packing as diverse forms of foodwork and labour

Physical labour: More than just packing lunch

Mothers often described packing lunch as a chore, characterizing it as a fairly quick, mundane, and menial task that was boring, but not overly burdensome or challenging. And yet, that it is required on a daily basis during the school week often made it feel like an unending and constant demand. Tara described it as a household task akin to laundry—a perpetual chore with no getting around it—while Shannon described it as "kind of like this treadmill that you're on." Many mothers relished mornings or evenings they were relieved of lunch packing. "Friday nights, I rejoice because oh, I don't need to make lunches for tomorrow!" Kristen exclaimed. Sophia described packing lunch as a relatively quick and straightforward process:

> [Y]ou open up the [lunch box] and you've got your five compartments. There's your cheese, there's your ham, there's your vegetable, there's your crackers, you know? And that's it.

However, participants' narratives revealed that packing lunches was hardly ever as straightforward or effortless as Sophia's comment suggests. While parents typically spent fifteen to forty-five minutes a day packing lunches, significant time and energy were spent planning, budgeting, shopping, preparing, and cleaning lunches. Every Sunday, Heather creates a weekly meal plan and grocery shops for the week, while Kristen spends Sunday afternoons meal prepping, slicing vegetables, and baking muffins for her children's lunches for the week. After school, lunchboxes are unpacked and emptied, leftover food or packaging composted or disposed of, containers washed, dishwashers run, and cleaning done. Thus, school lunch packing entails physical labour, not only in packing lunch but also in all the tasks preceding and following it. Moreover, it requires significant mental and emotional labour, which participants often identified as the most burdensome aspects of lunch packing.

Cognitive labour: "So much mental load!"

As Stacey walked through her lunch packing process, she listed both direct tasks and the cognitive load involved. She described "budgeting for groceries, planning the meals, and cooking," plus "thinking through like what pieces will be part of lunch, what pieces will be part of snacks in the future," and thinking "so much about what we have." She offered an example of deciding how many bananas to buy while grocery shopping, which illustrates the mental work of planning and managing school lunches:

> Like how many bananas should I buy? Because they're going to go brown. Like is anybody going to eat these bananas or are they going to have to become muffins? Or am I going to even have time to make muffins? Because then they're going to have to just get composted, and that's not what I want to do.

While mental labour is often an implicit process that goes unacknowledged and unnamed by those who perform it (Robertson et al., 2019), some mothers, like Stacey, explicitly identified the mental load required to plan, budget, shop, prepare, pack, clean, remember, worry about, and monitor lunches. Others shared examples of the cognitive labour they performed as they described planning and strategizing for lunches so that everything was accomplished within the time constraints of their busy lives. Even Sophia, who described lunch packing as a quick and straightforward task, runs through a mental checklist of the types of food to pack in the lunchbox. By distilling tasks into mental checklists or regular routines, she and other mothers demonstrated efforts to minimize their cognitive load.

While some mothers stated that lunch packing required little thought, such as Heather, who noted that "we're a little bit gone on autopilot," their descriptions of thought processes behind planning and packing lunches revealed significant amounts of cognitive labour. For example, mothers kept abreast of children's often evolving food preferences, monitored what foods came home uneaten, and tried to remember when their children declared that they were "off" of sandwiches or were "tired" of eating mandarin oranges in their lunches. Nadine, for example, described trying to keep ahead of her son's vegetable preferences, as "he goes through spurts of what vegetables he likes." Remembering to pack lunches, and making sure children left home with them and that lunches were unpacked after school, lingered in the back of mothers' minds, often while performing other foodwork and housework such as cooking dinner or getting their children ready for school. One mother described this as part of the "mental gymnastics" of morning routines and busy schedules revolving around work, school and daycare drop offs and pickups, extracurricular activities, and other parenting duties.

Emotional labour: Labour of love and carework

Many mothers emphasized wanting their children to not only be nourished by their lunch foods but to also feel happy, cared for, and loved through the lunches they packed. Through note writing, providing treats or special lunches, and accommodating children's preferences, participants made efforts to show care and affection for their children, demonstrating the emotional labour and caring work involved in lunch packing. For example, Jolie started drawing hand-written notes for her daughter's lunch when she began kindergarten to help her daughter feel connected with her while she was at school. She explained, "and then the note writing was just like "I love you," "I'm thinking about you," "I sent 100 kisses to the playground" type of thing. So then we just started doing it every day."

Others reported packing special lunches, including treats, and accommodating their children's likes and dislikes to make lunch enjoyable. Mothers described doing this not only to get kids to eat their lunch but also to avoid children getting bored or resentful of their lunches, showing how mothers were attuned to, and sought to manage, their children's emotional responses. For example, Evelyn allows her daughter to choose the granola bars for her lunch so that "she doesn't like dread lunchtime." Similarly, Stacey tries to "add a little touch of fun" by including two-pronged pricks with different animal characters on them. Whether through handwritten notes, special lunches, treats, or putting careful thought, time, and energy into planning, preparing, and packing them, lunch packing was understood by mothers as a way that they send messages to their children that they are thinking about them, that they are loved, and that they are cared for.

Emotional labour: Managing contradictory emotions about lunch packing

The emotional labour of lunch packing entailed how participants felt about this carework and how they managed a range of both positive and negative feelings about it. Many mothers reported feeling stressed by the cognitive burdens of packing lunch and a lack of time to get things done. For example, Tara explained how she "hates" lunch packing because "it's the thing that takes the most time in the morning in terms of devoting time to something that I get worried about. Because I always worry that I'm going to forget to do something." She went on to describe her feelings when her lunch packing efforts resulted in uneaten lunches:

> [O]ne of the things that's always struck me about packing lunches is the psychological impact it has when they come home, and it's not eaten....[W]hen they come home, and how oddly weird it feels—like devastating—when they haven't eaten their lunch. And I'm like, I put so much effort into it!

Other mothers similarly reported feelings of worry, anxiety, and frustration when lunches went uneaten. And when mothers felt they were not living up to feeding ideals, feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy were common:

> I feel a lot of guilt [about sending packaged foods]....But it's also in the waste of the world. Like our recycling bin. I was talking to my husband, like how is it always full?

> [T]his is a point of contention for me, where I feel like I'm not doing a good job if my kids aren't eating lunch.

These narratives reveal how mothers experience negative emotions when dealing with the stresses of packing lunch amidst pressures to safeguard their children's health (and that of the planet) and high expectations of the "gold standard lunch."

Still, some mothers described trying not to worry or feel bad about uneaten lunches or packing "unhealthy" foods, or feeling as if they should not feel this way. Stay-at-home mothers shared feeling unjustified in being stressed about time, as they perceived themselves having more time for household tasks compared to mothers working in paid employment. Mothers who described their children as more adventurous eaters qualified that lunch packing is likely more frustrating for parents with picky eaters. Some middle-class participants reflected that their relative financial resources make their lunch packing experiences less challenging than for those with lower incomes. These mothers expressed "trying" to not feel guilt or shame and actively working to manage or minimize negative feelings they experienced. As Tara said, "[I have] to step back and be like yeah, okay, it's not about me."

Though much less frequently described than negative emotions, mothers also reported positive emotions related to lunch packing. When they packed lunches they were proud of or when they perceived themselves as successfully enacting ideals or fulfilling responsibilities, mothers expressed a sense of pride, accomplishment, or satisfaction:

> Being able to know that he's going to have something hot in his system at lunch time to keep him warm makes me feel good as a parent.
>
> I know if I'm feeding her good things in the day, it makes me feel good.

Others described emotional attachments to lunch packing and the connection it fosters. For example, one mother fondly described the morning lunch packing routine as "a bonding time for the family." Another mother, despite feeling burdened and exhausted by it, shared she likes packing lunch to connect with her daughter during the school day, demonstrating how lunch packing can simultaneously evoke both positive and negative emotions.

Household division of lunch packing labour

In line with scholarship that shows women disproportionately bear the brunt of household labour and foodwork (e.g., Allen & Sachs, 2007; Beagan et al., 2008; Hochschild, 1989; Koch, 2019), participants in heterosexual relationships described performing the bulk of the labour of packing lunches as well as the foodwork within their home more generally. Most participants were their family's primary lunch packer. Some participants reflected critically and expressed discomfort with enacting gendered norms, speaking explicitly about the importance of fairly dividing household labour or sharing responsibility for foodwork with their partners. However, even when participants' male partners often or always packed lunch, mothers had extensive knowledge about lunch packing and performed much of the physical, emotional, and cognitive labour. In heterosexual partnerships, fathers primarily functioned as mothers' helpers, rather than as equal partners in managing school lunch processes. For example, Jolie explained how her husband helps pick up groceries, cook dinners (which she plans and preps), and unload the dishwasher, but that she carries the "emotional baggage" and "thinking" involved in packed lunches:

> My husband is amazing, but all of the planning or all the things—all the little things, all the emotional baggage, it's all on me.... And like actually filling her up is something that we always are thinking—or I'm always thinking about. My husband doesn't have to think about it.

Her correction of the term "we" to "I" mid-sentence is revealing. It illustrates a common sentiment among mothers that even when fathers performed physical tasks, such as picking up groceries, making sandwiches, packing lunches into backpacks, cutting fruits or vegetables, and cleaning dishes, mothers almost always carried the cognitive and emotional labour and bore the brunt of the planning, decision making, worrying about, and managing of food and lunch.

Delegating physical labour created added mental labour for some mothers, who described giving instructions and supervising their partners to ensure lunches were packed to their standards. Farah's husband contributes by packing the fruit portion of their daughter's lunch; yet, she manages the process by making decisions and supervising to ensure her instructions are followed:

> Farah: I pack the lunch. And my husband generally packs the fruit tiffin as per my instructions.

> Interviewer: And what kind of instructions do you give him?
>
> Farah: Like what is to be given in the fruit tiffin. Because Mina will be like don't give me fruits, I don't have time to eat, I want to go out to play. That means a really, really small fruit tiffin, which I'm not okay with. So I will tell him to just make sure that one whole apple is there. And that another fruit is there….Sometimes he will get influenced by her, but I am there to correct him.

Similarly, Stacey, who plans and prepares lunches for her husband to pack in the morning, expressed frustration about lunches not being executed as she carefully planned:

> [O]ccasionally little things will happen where he won't realize that I put the yogurt in a new spot, and he'll be like I didn't see yogurt, so I gave her two muffins. And I'm like ugh! What is going on? It's right there!

These examples illustrate how, even when male partners were portrayed as helpful, collaborative, or even equal partners in packing lunches, mothers bore the brunt of the cognitive and emotional labour. They carried the responsibility of decision making and ensuring that, regardless of who packed lunches, their children had nutritious, appropriate lunches for school. Delegating labour required cognitive load to ensure fathers packed lunch properly and emotional labour to manage frustrations when they did not.

Participants rationalized unequal divisions of labour, framing it as their choice and emphasizing that they were better equipped to pack lunch and perform foodwork more generally:

> [M]y husband, when he is in charge, is a little bit more like softy on like—okay, well maybe I'll just send you a grilled cheese then if that's what you want. And I'm like no! [Laughs] She has to have what's there. We can't just send a grilled cheese every day. There has to be a variety. She needs sustenance.
>
> I think my husband probably gives them more treats than I would….So it's been a balancing act for us to figure out, you know, how much is too much sugar. And how many treats are too many treats.

As these examples demonstrate, mothers commonly portrayed themselves as more skilled, knowledgeable, or simply caring more about food and health, making them better fit to make decisions about and pack school lunch. Concomitantly, they described shouldering much of the labour, pressures, and judgements associated with these roles.

Lunch packing as a source of judgement and scrutiny

Consistent with research on how intensive parenting ideology creates scrutiny of individual mothers' consumption and feeding practices (Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Kennedy & Kmec, 2019; Patico, 2020), participants described not only judging themselves, but also feeling judged and themselves judging other parents for their lunch packing practices. Social judgement was common when parents were perceived as either insufficiently or excessively invested in lunch packing.

Participants' narratives revealed that mothers judged themselves when packing lunches perceived as sub-par or when perceiving themselves as not putting enough effort, time, care, or planning into lunch packing. For example, Nicola sheepishly shared that she mostly makes sandwiches for lunch because "it's easy to put a sandwich together," then quickly reflected that this must make her sound "really lazy." Another mother expressed feeling she could "do better" when packing her daughter's lunch. She explained, "even when I'm packing her lunch, like I'll judge whatever I put into her lunch. Or I'll be like okay, I need to like think about this more and plan more." Simultaneously, many judged other parents' lunch packing as they compared the perceived healthfulness of their own children's lunches to others'. For example, Shannon scrutinized parents who put sweetened yogurt in their kids' lunches and differentiated herself from them by stating that her kids "don't ever eat sweetened yogurt." Kristen similarly criticized another child's lunch:

> [T]to my horror, she's got barbecue chips and the Caramilk squares for her snack, and then her lunch, I swear to God, was five bottles of Yop and some cheese strings and some crackers. And so, I'm horrified.

Participants also reported feeling judged by others, including other parents, teachers, and their own children. Tara, aware of potential judgement from teachers, told her son's teachers "don't judge us for the foods we send to school," while Kristen, a teacher, described how she might judge lunches in the classroom:

> I think like oh, if I glanced as a teacher and looked in at this lunch kit, would I be thinking like oh, that looks like a healthy lunch or would I be thinking oh my God, what the heck is in there?

Implicitly through uneaten lunches or more explicitly, participants also experienced judgement and scrutiny related to lunch packing from their own children:

> Well, I always want to make sure I'm providing [my daughter] with a balanced meal. [I]f I'm not—well, she would tell me. But I—yeah, I would feel like okay, this isn't good enough.

While judgement of insufficient care and commitment was more common, participants also scrutinized themselves or others for excessively caring or investing in lunch packing. For example, Kristen felt scrutinized by others for her "commitment to making lunches." She explained, "I think people in general might be somewhat alarmed by the commitment I have to making lunches." Other mothers similarly described how one could be perceived as too committed or overly invested in lunch packing:

> I have one of my good friends in class—one of her daughters is in my class. And she's like stop making us look bad! Daisy keeps asking why I don't send her notes. [Laughs]

> [T]here's this one mom who does this sort of like bento box thing where she cuts everything up into cutesy things and does all that. And then you just sort of hate that person because it's like how do you have the time and energy to do that?

As these comments suggest, the bounds of what is considered "appropriate" were quite narrow for some mothers, with a fine line between doing or caring too little versus too much. They reported making efforts to not only enact feeding and parenting ideals, but to simultaneously avoid overly controlling or investing in lunch packing, seeking a moderated approach where appropriate, but not excessive, amounts of control, time, money, care, emotion, and effort were devoted to their children's lunches. For example, Kristen lets her children choose their own lunches on Fridays because she "can't control everything."

These forms of judgement reveal that lunch packing carries not only emotional but also social weight. Mothers were evaluated by themselves and by others, and they evaluated other parents based on their perceived care, capability, and commitment to packing lunch. Participants conducted a balancing act of determining, then enacting, an appropriate level of investment, with the risk of potential judgement and scrutiny for either doing or caring too much or too little.

Discussion

This study aligns with and expands on previous work about the complexities of lunch packing, the various ways parents perceive lunch packing as social and emotional experiences, and how the foodwork of feeding children during the school day are intertwined with gendered identities and classed notions of "good" feeding and mothering. While previous Canadian research largely focused on parental barriers to packing healthy school lunches (Hawthorne et al., 2018; O'Rourke et al., 2020; Verdun, 2015), current findings resonate with studies from other industrialized countries, including the United States and United Kingdom, finding that mothers experience lunch simultaneously as labour and as an expression of love and care for children (Harman & Cappellini, 2014; Metcalfe et al., 2008), a way classed feeding and mothering ideals are performed (Allison, 1991), and a potent source of judgement, stigma, and shame for those who do not conform to dominant understandings of healthy lunches (Karrebaek, 2012). This study contributes to the body of scholarship on intensive mothering, feeding children, and school lunch as one of the first qualitative studies to shed light on the diversity of ways mothers experience and make meaning of lunch packing in the Canadian context.

Previous scholarship demonstrates that narratives of individualized responsibility for children's health and intensive parenting ideologies place high expectations and pressures on mothers related to feeding their children (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Cairns & Johnston; 2015; Patico, 2020; Power, 2016). Mothers interviewed here similarly reported high expectations and pressures surrounding packing lunch. For them, lunch packing was not simply a logistical task but also an important means of nurturing their children's growth and development, cultivating their health, wellbeing, and success, and socializing them into a habitus of healthy and responsible food preferences and practices. These findings align with previous research (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Patico, 2020) on middle-class mothers' efforts to socialize their children to make "good" food choices reflective of middle-class ideals. The mothers in this study seemed to embrace the neoliberal rhetoric of individualized responsibility by holding themselves, and other mothers, accountable for packing lunch "properly." In doing so, they further reflected previously reported notions of fatphobia, including fears of contributing to or being held responsible for their children's body size (Friedman, 2015).

This study adds to scholarship regarding how mothers navigate pressures of feeding children in sociopolitical and economic contexts that place responsibility for health and body size on the individual (e.g., Brenton, 2014; Oleschuk, 2020; Patico, 2020; Power, 2016). Participants reported devoting significant resources, time, and energy to lunch packing and navigating complex emotional and social effects of being the primary person to carry the weight of this responsibility and labour in their families. Like previous studies (e.g., Allen & Sachs, 2007; Beagan *et al.,* 2008; Hochschild, 1989; Koch, 2019), women interviewed here disproportionately bore the brunt of the labour and emotional effects of foodwork.

Despite shouldering physical, mental, and emotional labour, mothers forged connections with their children through lunch packing and saw it as emotionally meaningful and a symbol of their care, love, and responsibility. Notions of the "good" mother as one who is caring, capable, and committed to lunch packing resulted in both negative and positive feelings and judgements. Consistent with research on how intensive parenting ideology creates scrutiny of individual mothers' consumption and feeding practices (Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Kennedy & Kmec, 2019; Patico, 2020), we found that mothers not only feel judged, by themselves and by others, but also judge others for their lunch packing practices and decisions. Judgement and scrutiny were not reserved for those perceived as insufficiently enacting lunch packing and good mothering ideals but also extended to those perceived as excessively invested or committed to those ideals. Thus, the calibration of food femininities that Cairns and Johnston (2015) observed among middle-class white women was also apparent among mothers here who worked to calibrate their lunch packing practices and navigate the bounds of acceptability.

These findings indicate that, for these mothers, a "balanced" lunch does not simply mean a *nutritionally* balanced lunch. Lunch packing requires mothers to perform balancing acts of various forms of labour and contradictory emotions. Entwined with complex and sometimes competing meanings, it is simultaneously a burdensome task to be dreaded but also a pleasurable one, something mothers must care deeply about and yet be cautious to not overly invest in. It is a seemingly simple and menial chore that, upon deeper examination, entails considerable work and holds significant social and emotional weight. Together, these findings demonstrate the complexities of packing lunch and the many and varied meanings mothers assign to it in an era of intensive parenting and neoliberalism.

Limitations and future research directions

Triangulation with previous research conducted within the school district, including parent surveys and classroom ethnography conducted by our research team (Black et al., 2020; Black et al., 2022; Elliott & Black, 2020) along with discussion with researchers involved in those projects, supports the relevance and validity of many of the major themes and findings; however, additional qualitative and quantitative studies are warranted for further validation. It is important to note that this predominantly white, middle-class sample with relatively high levels of formal education is not representative of this school district nor of Canada. Study participants were selected from a convenience sample, and all interviews were conducted in English, which limits the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, many participants expressed interest in food and health and were able and willing to spend one to two hours participating. Moreover, the lack of class and racial diversity among participants prevented a fulsome exploration of how mothers' lunch packing experiences intersected with class or racial identities. While some indications of class and ethnic differences were identified in these data, analyses did not focus on them. Existing literature suggests that class, ethnicity, and other contextual differences (e.g., employment status) are related to mothers' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of feeding their children and the meanings they ascribe to feminine ideals (e.g., Bowen et al., 2019; Brenton, 2014; Elliott et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2015). Future studies should explore lunch packing experiences and meanings in different class, ethnic, and geographic contexts to see whether these findings hold, paying specific attention to differences or similarities between groups. The literature (e.g., Cairns and Johnston, 2015) shows that there are multiple femininities that differ by class and race; thus, future analyses of lunch packing should interrogate the ways in which white, middle class lunchbox ideals and practices set standards and how those standards are policed in order to reproduce hegemonic femininity.

While our study explores some of the gendered division of lunch packing labour from mothers' perspectives, future research could explore fathers' lunch packing experiences to provide more insight into relationships between gender, lunch packing, labour, care, and responsibility. Future quantitative studies could also explore the labour involved in lunch packing to better understand the scope and value of mothers' unpaid labour currently devoted to lunch packing, especially in a country like Canada where the majority of children eat packed lunches at school and parents are primarily responsible for providing school lunches.

This research is especially timely given the federal government's recent release of a national school food policy (Government of Canada, 2024) and work towards a national school meal program (Prime Minister of Canada, 2021), as well as provincial governments' recent actions to expand school meal programming (e.g., Government of British Columbia, 2022, 2023). While this study focused specifically on school lunch packing, it did not delve into mothers' perceptions of school lunch programs nor the facilitators and barriers to participation, which may be affected by myriad other considerations including household composition, resources, cultural expectations, or diverse expectations around the roles of mothers in foodwork.

Conclusion

This article examined mothers' experiences and perceptions of school lunch packing. Analyses of semi-structured interviews demonstrated that mothers view lunch packing as an individualized responsibility to cultivate their children's health that requires diverse forms of labour to enact intensive feeding and mothering ideals. This foodwork is a potent source of emotions for mothers, who scrutinize themselves and other parents and, in turn, feel judged by others. This research suggests that there is potential for high quality school food programs to better support parents and caregivers of school-age children, and mothers in particular, by reducing or relieving them of the time, energy, and labour required to feed children lunch during the school week. Yet, findings also indicated that lunch packing is a meaningful and rewarding experience for some families. Parents are key stakeholders in the feeding practices of children, who both influence and are impacted by the diverse forms of foodwork required to provision school meals. Hence, understanding and addressing parents', and especially mothers', experiences and engaging them in planning and reform will be pivotal for future school food policy programming in Canada.

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Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 194–196 August 2024

Canadian Food Studies La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation

Book Review

Growing and eating sustainably: Agroecology in action

By Dana James and Evan Bowness

2021 Fernwood Publishing. 128 pages

Reviewed by Richard Bloomfield*

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Dana James and Evan Bowness' book, *Growing and Eating Sustainably: Agroecology in Action*, provides a portrayal of existing sites of a radically different food system in southern Brazil. A uniquely designed book including glossy pages and dozens of striking photographs of farmers and activists is a novel way to demonstrate how transitions to agroecology[1] are happening. For me, it is a captivating approach to presenting these transitions because it draws individual stories out from abstract notions of ideal futures and brings them to life with their particularities.

As the title indicates, the authors focus their attention on action, and therefore this is not a book that explores larger theoretical debates such as the *Agrarian Question*[2] in-depth. However, they do provide a theoretical starting point for their work, primarily leaning on Erik Olin Wright's conception of "real utopias"—envisioning and creating alternative social structures and systems that aim for a more just and equitable society—and Stephen Gliessman's five-step framework on transitioning global food systems to agroecology (Gliessman, 2015; Wright, 2010). In short, Gliessman's framework starts by requiring a movement away from conventional inputs, then substituting inputs with new practices, followed by redesigning the agroecosystem based on ecological processes, and then reestablishing direct connections

[1] Agroecology is a social movement which seeks to transform agricultural systems toward biodiversity, adaptability, and justice (James and Bowness, 2021).

[2] Scholarship which has sought to understand the role of agriculture in society, in relation to economic development, social structure, and political power. This includes but is not limited to land ownership and distribution dynamics, the relationship between agriculture productivity and technology, rural development schemes, and the impacts of globalization on trade and market integration (Akram-Lodhi, 2021).

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between growers and producers, and, after the previous four steps, building new global food systems based on equity, participation and justice that help restore earth's life support systems. James and Bowness rightly point out that this framework can seem linear, but on the ground this is rarely the case and therefore note the importance of experimentation and place-based understanding.

The first two foundational chapters introduce the reader to agroecology and the concept of food-systems transitions and provide an overview of the current industrial food system (IFS). The authors document a brief history of the substantial changes to, and present challenges of, our IFS, and make their theoretical orientation clear as a part of critical agrarian studies. They briefly, but effectively, outline the contradictions and crises of the IFS highlighting the corporate power, rising chemical toxicity, and overproduction since the Green Revolution. They conclude that given the imbalance of power, and the unaccounted for negative externalities in the market-driven IFS, a transition to an agroecological future is imperative. The authors chose southern Brazil because of its biological and sociocultural diversity as well as its recent deeply entrenched agricultural industrialization while also hosting some of the most influential agrarian social movements contesting this entrenchment.

Chapter three is modeled on Gliessman's level one and two in transitioning food systems. The authors describe a participatory guarantee system, "Rede Ecovida," which is an alternative to third-party certification such as Organic or Fair Trade. Rede Ecovida uses peer-to-peer grassroots learning, is more socially oriented than the third-party equivalent, and includes co-developing standards and self-certifying. Ultimately, this certification is more time consuming but less costly for the participants. The reader meets formidable people on the front lines of this work through both text and photography, like Heliton, who has transitioned a conventional tobacco farm into a diversified agroecological crop and pasture farm certified through Rede Ecovida, allowing him to sell through local, rather than export markets, obtaining higher profit margins. Heliton's personal satisfaction in this transition work is well captured by the supplementary photography.

However, the authors did not take up seriously the barriers to scaling this participatory model in other regions given that many farmers attempting more labour-intensive agroecological methods are often struggling to have enough labour to enact such a structure. Although they employ Wright's conception of "real utopias" as justification for building on this kind of gradual transformation within existing conditions, it falls short of acknowledging the need for much larger structural changes that would be required to liberate most small-scale farmers from the dominate inequality generating capitalist system.

In chapter four James and Bowness move to Gliessman's level three, presenting several examples of agroecosystem redesign based on a new set of ecological processes. Noting earlier in the book how difficult an economic livelihood can be to sustain for many small-scale farmers, it was encouraging to see the benefits of diversification of income through agritourism. However, these diversifications are likewise firmly embedded within a market-based system and face similar scalability barriers in the form of time and capital. The authors also engage with the dynamics and challenges of urban folks seeking a rural life and gaining access to land while also drawing the urban rural connection through a revolutionary community-led urban composting program and responsible consumer cells (CCR) in Florianopolis. Each example, though place specific, will be a relatable challenge to practitioners, familiar to food studies scholars and the solutions compelling to both.

Finally, in chapter five, the authors elevate the outcomes of pursuing an agroecological future, moving to level four of Gliessman's framework; to reestablish rural and urban connections between eaters and growers. The authors provide examples such as the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MMC), a rural women's movement playing an active role in women's liberation and empowerment within agroecology and demonstrate that feminist, anti-racist, and democratic practices are necessary to avoid reproducing social power imbalances through more environmentally friendly farming. They also show Tekoa V'ya, which has grown from fifteen to forty-four families since obtaining their land in 2009, as a powerful example of Indigenous food sovereignty.

The authors conclude that individuals seeking radical change can achieve this from within existing structures and conditions while remaining ambitious enough to see a different future. For some, this may feel too hopeful given the tenuous success alternative movements have had compared to the predominate corporately controlled IFS. For others interested and familiar with critical food studies, this hope is often missing from academic texts. This book would be an excellent complement text to any undergraduate course exploring food studies. Specifically, the illustrations of transition could help students grasp the practical implications of complex critical agrarian theories which ultimately provide the foundation for agroecology. James and Bowness' presentation of equal parts photography and text is a welcome change, capturing the emotion and humanity of those pursuing the transformation of our food system and could inspire other similar works. The book is accessible while still embedding important theories from the beginning, although not without shortcomings, as a backdrop for the real-world stories provided throughout. In *Growing and eating sustainably,* James and Bowness aim to inspire us to protect earth's life support systems on which we all depend and illustrate both visually and textually that, through the lens of agroecology, there is no independence; rather there is only responsible or irresponsible dependence.

Richard Bloomfield is passionate about the social and environmental sustainability of food production. He is a PhD candidate in Geography and Environment at Western University and is researching the political economy of agro-food systems by examining current farmland policy, ownership dynamics, and alternative land-use models that support next or first-generation farmers in Ontario. He co-founded Urban Roots London in 2017, a non-profit urban farm that is addressing issues around food access.

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Choux Questionnaire: Greg de St. Maurice

A riff on the well-riffed Proust Questionnaire, the CFS Choux Questionnaire is meant to elicit a tasty and perhaps surprising experience, framed within a seemingly humble exterior. (And yes, some questions have a bit more *craquelin* than others.) Straightforward on their own, the queries combined start to form a celebratory pyramid of extravagance. How that composite croquembouche is assembled and taken apart, however, is up to the respondents and readers to determine. Respondents are invited to answer as many questions as they choose.

The final question posed— *What question would you add to this questionnaire?*—prompts each respondent to incorporate their own inquisitive biome into the mix, feeding a forever renewed starter culture for future participants. For this edition, our respondent has replied to a question from Lisa Heldke (CFS Vol. 10 #2).

Our Choux Questionnaire respondent for this issue is Greg de St. Maurice, an Associate Professor in Keio University's Faculty of Business and Commerce. He holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology (University of Pittsburgh) and Master's degrees from Oxford University, Ritsumeikan University, and American University. He served as the Vice President of ASFS from 2017 to 2022

What is your idea of a perfect food?

I recently came back across that dietary advice to eat the same "healthy" foods you like (oatmeal with blueberries, protein shakes, etc.) every day to make it easy to maintain a healthy diet. So when you ask this question I immediately think about how, for me, good foods go beyond providing nutrition and tasting good, as important as those two things are. They have to be grounded in a place, a time, a culture. They have to have a story and meaning. Even better, stories and meanings. And, yeah, I can't eat the same thing every day.

Of what food or food context are you afraid?

I'm afraid that we're losing agrobiodiversity that could help us maintain sustainable food systems in the face of climate change. I'm also afraid of eating squishy bugs, but that's different.

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What word or concept describes an admirable food system?

Empathy. Also diversity. Is two cheating?

What word or concept prevents many food systems from becoming admirable?

Short-term profits.

Which food person do you most admire?

I admire the people who make World Central Kitchen's work happen. What they've accomplished is astounding. I also wish more people knew about Labour Protection Network, which is actively trying to eliminate human trafficking and forced labour in the Southeast Asian fishing industry.

Which food innovation do try to ignore?

You know how food companies will add nutrients to junk food and make sure they tell you about it in big letters on the label? I'm pretty successful at ignoring those labels—if I'm going to eat junk food, I'll buy it for the taste, not because I'm telling myself that it's a "healthy" food.

What is your greatest gastronomic extravagance?

The past few summers I've splurged on Okinawan mangoes. They're so good, but cheap they are not! I've also been making cocktails at home and buying different ingredients feels extravagant.

What is your current state of hunger?

Non-hunger. I'm preparing dinner (lemon-and-sage braised chicken, also asparagus) and I'll be hungry by the time it's ready.

What do you consider to be the most overrated food or food context?

Expensive restaurants and famous restaurants. And conversely, cheap food.

On what occasion do you feign satiety?

I'm more likely to feign not being hungry when I haven't eaten. Like during the last part of a long meeting when all I can think of is what I'm going to eat when it's over.

What do you most dislike about dinner tables?

The rules, the formality, the manners. I'm more of a kitchen table kind of guy for sure.

What is the quality you most like in a fruit?

I love it when a fruit has both acidity and sweetness. Passion fruit, currants, and citrus fruits are among my favourites.

What is the quality you most like in a cut of meat?

For me it's about a combination of flavour and texture. I was thinking about this recently because wagyu has this marbling of fat that makes it so tender you could practically eat it with a straw.

And when I went to Montana for the ASFS/AFHVS conference in 2010 I had a steak made from local grass-fed beef that was firm and juicy. I appreciate both.

Which condiments do you most overuse?

Grated cheese—as long as I don't have to grate it.

What kinds of gardens make you happiest?

Delicious, colourful, sustainable gardens. I dream of having a garden bigger than the approximation of a garden I have on my balcony right now—though the hibiscus, cilantro, and basil do bring me joy.

Which culinary skill would you most like to have?

I want to learn how to process and cook whole fish. When I was in my Ph.D. program my advisor, Rich Scaglion, would gift me quail and chukar that he shot (his partner keeps a vegetarian kitchen). My mother helped me defeather the birds and remove the internal organs. She was a real pro—she did it so quickly. I want to be able to do the fish equivalent.

What do you consider your greatest edible achievement?

Okay, so I'm not a great cook by any standard. The individual who has the most faith in my cooking (and coincidentally the most conviction that I will drop things in the kitchen) is my dog. And most of my cooking has an experimental element. A few years ago, I added soy sauce lees (the solids left over from making soy sauce) to chocolate chip cookie batter. The cookies tasted different. I enjoyed them. And I was ecstatic and surprised when a friend's son said they were so delicious he saved them so he could have one for breakfast every day until they ran out. He requested them the next time I visited too.

If you were to die and come back as an (edible) animal, vegetable, or mineral, what would you like it to be?

I'll take my chances with coming back as a capybara. If I came back as a capybara in a Japanese zoo and not someplace where I'd be someone's dinner, I'd get to do a lot of socializing and hanging out in hot spring baths.

Where (and/or when) would you most like to dine?

I've wanted to go to Tunisia for a very long time—ever since I went to a small Tunisian restaurant in the Boston area where every dish was full of different flavours, many of them new, even revelatory.

When do you have no appetite?

After I've eaten! Or when I'm absorbed in whatever I'm doing, though it's also easier to be absorbed in what you're doing when you're not hungry…

What is your most treasured kitchen implement?

I don't really have any irreplaceable kitchen implements, but I guess I would choose a *donabe* (clay pot) that some friends bought for me at a mutual friend's shop as a housewarming present. It was made by a potter in Shiga Prefecture and it's wide and shallow and perfect for making hot pot dishes.

What do you consider to be the most processed kind of food?

Protein bars, white chocolate, candy, diet cola. And definitely not mint chocolate chip ice cream, chewing gum, doughnuts, Cheddar cheese, or other things that I enjoy.

What is your favourite aroma?

I love the scent of lime. Also cardamom. Other contenders might be the aroma of grilled meat, butter and sugar (think Belgian waffles), or fried garlic.

What spice, kitchen implement, or cookbook do you use most rarely?

I had a small container of asafoetida but realized that I was using it too infrequently and I could smell it in my apartment on hot days, so I ended up tossing it.

What do you most value in your friends?

Support and levity. True friends support each other even as they change and the world changes.

Who are your favourite food scholars?

I've been so lucky to have been part of the ASFS and AFHVS communities. I'm also grateful that I've been able to participate in Japanese food studies networks. I got a master's degree in social anthropology at Oxford, where grades were determined by final written exams that everyone took together. One question was something like "Who is your favourite deceased anthropologist and why?" That question seemed like a trap but I wanted to answer Mary Douglas. Her insights resonate with me still.

Who is your hero of food media?

Alexis Nikole Nelson. The content she puts on Instagram and TikTok is smart, informative, and fun. As for academics on social media, I always pay attention when I see Emily Contois or Krishnendu Ray have posted something new.

With which cuisine do you most identify?

Immigrant cuisine, hands down. My mother was French and she cooked French cuisine in southwestern Pennsylvania. But I've spent time in many different countries and now live in Japan. I'm just as likely to use my wok to prepare dinner as I am to use my Dutch oven or my *donabe*. And my spice blends include Bengal five spice, herbes de Provence, and *shichimi togarashi*...

What is your most powerful sense?

Smell (sigh).

What are your favourite agricultural, culinary, or gastronomic words?

As a consumer, words like “heirloom,” “local,” and “artisanal” draw my attention. As a scholar, I’ve become really interested in the onomatopoeic words for describing texture in Japanese. Pari-pari! Fuwa-fuwa! Saku-saku! Last year, when students from the Culinary Institute of America came to Japan, I was invited to give a guest lecture and I took the opportunity to do it on this topic. I got a friend who is a wagashi maker to make two types of sweets using the same ingredients but a slightly different technique to achieve distinctive textures. It was fun.

What is it about composting that you most dislike?

That it's not easy to do when you live in a small apartment in urban Japan!

What would you eat as your last meal?

A lot of people choose something simple and light. I'd want a full meal. I'll start with a cocktail (a whiskey sour?) and an appetizer (maybe a torotaku roll?) Then something decadent like lasagna, followed by steak and a crisp green salad. And some very tasty red wine, the kind I don't usually get to drink. And dessert—tarte Tatin maybe? Or baba au rhum?

What foodish epitaph would you assign to yourself?

"He savoured food and life."

What question would you add to this questionnaire?

"Tell us a story about a food you used to dislike but now like or vice versa."

And...

In response to Lisa Heldke's question, "If you had to cook a meal for a stranger using the contents of your refrigerator and cupboard right now, what would you make?"

Have you ever seen the Korean TV show "Chef & My Fridge"? What a show! It was on Netflix for a while but isn't any more and I'll use this forum to advocate for its return (Netflix execs, are you listening?) Every episode features celebrities whose real life fridges are wheeled into the TV studio where famous chefs compete by making dishes using ingredients from the fridges. Anyway, if a stranger came to my house and I had to prepare something for them with what I have on hand . . . it would depend on whether they're vegetarian or not. I'd give them that classic airplane question: chicken or pasta? The chicken would be teriyaki and the pasta would be garlic and olive oil.

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