

CITIES OF FARMERS

Urban Agricultural
Practices and Processes

Edited by Julie C. Dawson and Alfonso Morales

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agriculture and public health, and the interrelationships between policy, urban food production, the built environment, and population health. Various practitioners and audiences will find these chapters useful in how they use the language of various disciplines to show how to design health interventions, tailor evaluations, or form reasonable expectations about the effects of urban agriculture in their own communities. Included are case studies that review approaches and discuss best practices, in order to provide options for practitioners seeking to improve community health through the built environment, urban agriculture, and organizations such as food councils.

The interconnectedness of the issues involved in food systems is clear from the multiple topics that each chapter addresses. While this book is centered on urban food production, it is impossible to treat production in isolation. Throughout these chapters we see the opportunities in urban agriculture though innovations in production, policy, and community engagement. Food systems do not fit into neat categories, and they span multiple dimensions of urban planning and urban-rural connections. This is what makes them both exciting to develop and difficult to change quickly. This volume attempts to describe historical trends and document current innovations in urban agriculture with the goal of engaging multiple audiences in a discussion of the broader issues surrounding urban food systems and planning. It is with enthusiasm that we invite you to discover the many manifestations of urban agriculture and its relationship to healthy cities and citizens.

CHAPTER 2

Food from Scratch for the Zenith of the Unsalted Seas

Creating a Local Food System in Early-Twentieth-Century Duluth, Minnesota

RANDEL D. HANSON

How do you create a locally harvested food system for a city of one hundred thousand? This question is being asked in many cities and regions across the United States. It was also an urgent local question a century ago.

Indeed, across the United States a century ago, public and private concerns were scrambling to get a handle on the haphazard process by which nature was transformed into edible human culture within rapidly urbanizing America. This was a chaotic, wasteful, and powerfully transformative period, with rural populations shifting into cities as the primary engine for economic activities shifted from agricultural to industrial (Tangires 2003; Cronon 1991; Danbom 1979).

The rapid growth of industrial cities forced an emerging municipal responsibility for the various inputs and outputs of this emergent urban life (Melosi 2008; Tarr 1984). Public and private city planners in the late nineteenth

century began to reflect on and intervene in this laissez-faire urbanization, including how to procure ample food of adequate quality and reasonable cost to citizens (Morales 2000; Vitiello and Brinkley 2013). As was the case in many communities (see, for example, Jayson Otto's discussions of these issues as they related to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the following chapter), it became apparent that leaving the issue of food to "the market" was wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the emergent society from any number of perspectives. Progressive-era politicians and citizens began to collaborate in planning for the needs of cities and their inhabitants, creating solutions as they were then defined. These histories of civic engagement with our food system by city governments, business organizations, and citizen groups represent a fascinating window into our past just as they help us think about our challenges and barriers for creating more desirable food systems within contemporary society.

While there were general issues that characterized the food challenges of early-twentieth-century industrial cities, many communities faced unique problems. The challenges faced by Duluth fell primarily into the latter category. Indeed, early-twentieth-century Duluth found itself in a food systems quandary. Situated on the western tip of Lake Superior amid vast, thick northern forests, the city was growing rapidly with the immense wealth garnered from exploiting the region's then-abundant natural capital. Timber from surrounding forests was being clear-cut and hacked into lumber to build the cities southward; the very rich and easily accessible iron ore of the Range was being gouged out and railroaded to Lake Superior docks in Duluth and elsewhere, filling ships and bank accounts; and grain from the newly plowed midwestern prairies and plains was being brought to port for shipping eastward, leveraging the ship canal and ever-improving harbor facilities for this zenith point in North America for oceangoing vessels. New steel plants were being built, and countless spin-off and allied manufacturing, supply, and production companies were proliferating in an urban-industrial frenzy. Nearly tripling in population across two decades, Duluth experienced a phenomenal rate of population growth that was greater than that of New York or Chicago in 1910, and local boosters fantasized that Duluth would become the North American hub as infrastructure developed (Van Brunt 1921). As a result of this combination of abundant raw material, labor, and natural amenities,

Duluth hosted more millionaires per capita at this point than any other city in the United States. These were heady times in Duluth, and the city fathers were indeed filling their plates.

Although the city was rapidly growing, more than eighty thousand Duluthians lived for the most part on the narrow 24-mile strip of land hugging the western Lake Superior shore. The surrounding region was very sparsely populated save for the booming and busting mining and timber towns spread across the hinterlands. Eugene Van Cleef, a geographer at Duluth State Normal School (which would become the University of Minnesota-Duluth), worried in an article published in the Bulletin of the American Geographical Society in 1912 that the "permanence" of Duluth was threatened by the lack of an agrarian base, warning that "mineral resources alone do not invite a large population; they must be accompanied by food to support the people who market them" (Van Cleef 1912). More to the point, business leaders of Duluth were worried about attracting the important middlemen and women to run the businesses that were proliferating: poor-quality food, it was feared, would hinder their importation. And they were worried as well about the prices of food, which in cities around the United States were reaching all-time peaks, often taking between 40 and 60 percent of an average family's income (Donofrio 2007). Riots were sparked by this situation in New York and elsewhere, and the strong Duluth labor community (and its diverse political ideas and aspirations that challenged the status quo) was seen by industry captains as potentially fomenting local protest around food prices (Hudelson and Ross 2006). Given the lack of any local food supply, the availability and price of food in Duluth were indeed problematic.

The Duluth Commercial Club (a forerunner of a chamber of commerce type of organization) was at this point a powerful civic and political organ that assembled and channeled the business interests of Duluth, and its members began to consider the necessity of proactively building a local food supply (Stockbridge 1913). At the turn of the century, some of the wealthy members of the club had purchased clear-cut land for their summer homes beyond Skyline Drive, which ran along the top of the 1,800-foot drop into the Lake Superior basin. On these lands they began to dabble in agriculture and animal husbandry. As these "city fathers" carried out their projects, they realized both the potential of agriculture in the region and the difficulties, including

dealing with the stumps of clear-cut trees, the new secondary growth that quickly sprouted up, and the rising prices of arable land in the area.

Taking all these issues into account, Duluth Commercial Club members sketched out a plan to jump-start a food system from scratch, including production and distribution components, to supply fresh produce to area restaurants, grocers, and households ("March of the Cities" 1911). Club secretary Major Eva created an agricultural subcommittee of its Public Affairs Committee, and one of their first actions was to hire Mr. A. B. Hostetter, a lifelong farmer and long-term teacher of farmers in the agricultural institutes of Illinois. Hostetter was turned loose with his considerable experience and sufficient club resources to pull together the educational, public relations, and networking elements to spark a local food system. Other club directors, including Charles Craig, owner of the Jean Duluth Farm and all-around entrepreneur, went to work on creating structures that could channel the developing public and private interests around food and agriculture.

After sizing up the situation, Hostetter approached the Duluth public schools to embrace agricultural education, but they demurred. Undaunted, Hostetter approached the YMCA, which began offering classes in poultry production in 1910; by 1911 the "Y" had added gardening classes, integrating a teacher for each of the twenty public schools in the city (Stockbridge 1913). Hostetter also worked with the Duluth Homecroft Association (DHA), a local arm of the national Homecroft movement, designed to encourage local self-sufficiency and healthy living (Garvey 1978). As a "model city" in this movement, Duluth boasted the founding in 1909 of Homecroft Park, which sold one-acre lots to area residents for a back-to-the-land urban lifestyle. Hostetter harnessed the energy of this movement by partnering with the DHA, which began to offer courses in cooking local produce, preserving foods, and managing the vagaries of such enterprises. Various churches, fairs, and community gatherings were encouraged to hold friendly competitions over the fruits and vegetables of these labors to generate greater interest. And the prized specimens were also brought to state fairs in Saint Paul, New York City, and other places to boost the image of agriculture in the region and attract potential farmers.

Mr. Hostetter and other Duluth Commercial Club members also leveraged their networks and the growing food needs of US Steel and its employees by partnering with the various railroad companies in the region, each of which had excess lands adjacent to its tracks (Stockbridge 1913). Together they crafted plans to create farms along the tracks, bunched into groups that would become small towns connected to the nearest train stop, which could serve as a portal for produce bound for urban destinations. To help grow these small centers for agricultural production, Hostetter created "educational trains" in which agronomic experts in seeds, produce varieties, production methods, management expertise, and so forth would travel on appointed days, stopping at each town to dispense their knowledge, praise, encouragement, and institutional support. Free seeds were distributed to town children, who were encouraged to compete with each other to grow the best produce, with the winners garnering prizes that the club also dispensed.

But problems in boosting a food system also existed because of a lack of access to lands closer to the city that could be agriculturally productive and affordable. Indeed, given the rapid population growth and the craggy landscapes along Lake Superior, land was quite expensive and arable land was scarce. How could you justify farming on land close to the city that was so expensive? To address this problem, several Duluth Commercial Club members, led by Charles Craig and mining lawyer and future University of Minnesota regent John G. Williams, founded the Greysolon Farms Company in 1910 (Mattocks 1911). The Greysolon Farms Company land occupied a mile-square area on Duluth's northern urban edge near Jean Duluth and Martin Roads; the land was developed as small farms ranging from one to fifteen acres for both rental and sale to workers, truck farmers, and distant farmers who might be coaxed from elsewhere to relocate. Craig and colleagues devised long-term financial agreements amenable to people to both rent and purchase land from which stumps were removed, and they created another, less expensive track for those who were willing to remove such obstacles to farming themselves. And as part of the deal, the Greysolon Farms Company would help people learn the skills of "intensive cultivation, market gardening, and dairy farming under the most modern scientific conditions" so they could make profits sufficient to justify purchasing the lands (and fulfill the food-supply ends of the club). The Greysolon Farms Company quickly took off, renting and selling agricultural lands for home and market production. Educational courses were held on the Greysolon Farms Company lands, organized by Hostetter, helping the aspiring farmers gain the necessary skill sets to produce

for nearby markets. The creation of the Greysolon Farms Company was also not coincidentally commercially successful, creating profits for investors by adding value to cutover lands by removing stumps and getting the lands into cultivatable condition.

The University of Minnesota was also interested in inserting itself into the formal development of an agricultural infrastructure in the western Lake Superior region as part of its broader land grant mission (Thompson 1938, 1954). In 1911, the Minnesota state legislature authorized the Board of Regents to come to Duluth to seek lands that could support an experimental station akin to others that it was creating around the state. The Greysolon Farms Company lands were widely seen as the best farmland in the immediate Duluth area. The university negotiated hard with Greysolon's owners, drawing out the arguments for over a year, but eventually the university purchased some 240 acres at Greysolon's asking price and founded the Northeast Demonstration Farm and Experimental Station. Bolstering Greysolon Farm's activities, this new station quickly ramped up its operations. By the spring of 1913, Superintendent Mark J. Thompson was hired and the farm quickly developed as a combination dairy, poultry, and truck farm. Although the "Great Fire of 1918" burned this area, it was a temporary setback: the Northeast Experimental Station (which soon became its official name) became an important piece of the agricultural architecture of the region as a site for demonstration, production, and education. Thompson remained a main force on the farm for several decades, contributing to the "golden years" of research and extension services in the region.

Seeding education and production lands were two key aspects of building a food system from scratch that were now set in motion, but distribution was also a problem. To address this problem, the Duluth Commercial Club worked with area farmers to found a Cooperative Produce Warehouse in west Duluth in 1910 to supply goods to city retailers ("Model Co-operative Marketing Association" 1911). This experiment soon ran up against stubborn economic realities: there were not enough farmers bringing produce to the warehouse to make it economically self-sufficient, and the Commercial Club, which was underwriting the project, soon grew dismayed with the ongoing financial losses and finally shut the doors. In the wake of the closure, the club worked with area farmers to create the Producer's Cooperative Market Association

as a more diffuse organizational means to represent and boost the interests of area farmers in distribution issues. In addition, the city of Duluth founded the Duluth Farmers Market in 1912 to service private households (Stockbridge 1913; see also Morales 2000 on Chicago's Maxwell Street Market). This first iteration of the Duluth Farmers Market, regulated by the City Council, opened up shop in the armory, adding two additional satellite markets in other parts of the city. That first year twenty-five farmers used the market to sell produce, which was all locally harvested, and the Duluth Farmers Market has in one form or another remained a part of the city ever since.

In sum, an amazing amount of energy and organization was brought to bear on the creation of a local food system for Duluth in the early part of the twentieth century. For an interim period that lasted several decades, this bid to create a local food system worked: locally harvested produce began to flow into area outlets, people turned to farming as an occupation, and other distant farmers relocated here. This local food system grew throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and vegetables like potatoes, brassicas, celery, and lettuce became staples that were grown in large fields sufficient to supply locally and ship elsewhere. Small-fruit production, particularly raspberries, was also robust enough to not only supply the region but also ship refrigerated train-car loads to Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Omaha. Simply put, regional food production thrived.

But as it did with so many aspects of US society, the advent of World War II signaled a profound change for the Duluth local food system. For one thing, the war effort demanded that as many people as possible work in activities related to iron ore and steel. In addition, the wage-oriented consumer society that flourished after the war continued the movement away from agriculture in the region. Small farms developed over the previous several decades were abandoned, and today we see these overgrown places all around the area. By the 1950s, larger-scale commercial farming across the United States began to edge out small-scale producers en masse, and regional and international specialization and development created the basis for the global industrial food system (Thompson 1959). Corporate farming became an increasing norm, as agriculture become vertically integrated into global food corporations. Farming in northern Minnesota ebbed steadily given the ever-cheapening cost of industrial food produced by externalizing so many of the trust costs of both

production and distribution methods. Suburban sprawl began to creep into the richer agricultural lands north of the city. By the mid-1970s, a regional food infrastructure seemed too outmoded if not already gone, and the Northeast Experimental Station was closed in 1976, signaling a tardy ceremony for the ending of a local food system in the western Lake Superior region. And if this dirge was not heard, the small-farm crisis of the 1980s drove nails into the proverbial coffin of smaller-scale farming in the region, the state, and across the country (Hurt 2002; Lyson 2004).

In the wake of this industrialization of farming, nascent organizations designed to support small-scale sustainable farming and gardening began to appear across the United States, inspired by the resilient voices of people like Rachel Carson, Wes Jackson, Wendell Berry, Barry Commoner, and others. Community-based gardening in Duluth began to take shape in the late 1970s, and in 1981 the Duluth Community Garden Program was formally founded. Food cooperatives appeared in the 1970s, including Duluth's Whole Foods Co-op, which continues to expand into the present. The Land Stewardship project was created in Minnesota in 1982, and in 1988 the Sustainable Farming Association was created. These local and regional organizations have sought to continue a home garden and small-scale agriculture practice amid a fast-food and industrial agriculture that has systematically de-educated people about food and the skills of farming and gardening. Now that the health, community, and ecological bills of the externalizing system of industrial agriculture are coming due in ways that can no longer be ignored, these community and regional organizations resonate with greater authority and importance as we seek to bring their visions from the margins to the center (Reganold et al. 2011; Syring 2012; Stark, Abazs, and Syring 2011).

To paraphrase the English scholar and activist Stuart Hall, "hegemony is hard work." The hegemony of the global industrial food system is both powerful and rigid: we partake in its reproduction with an unnerving knowledge of its destructive wake. How can we use this knowledge to build a healthier food system for individuals, communities, and the landscape? Looking back on this largely successful early-twentieth-century transformation of the Duluth food system, we see some intriguing pathways. The people who organized the changes thought big and systemically, they integrated people and organizations across sectors, and they leveraged powers beyond Duluth that

had interests in the city. How can we use their story as we wrestle with smart decline from an industrial paradigm with eyes wide open in optimism for the possibilities of a more sustainable future for ourselves and those who will find themselves on these same soils a hundred years hence?

In short, how can we work for the "permanence" of Duluth by laying the foundations for a sustainable food system? Time to put our shoulders to the wheel, as the arc of history does not get bent in a just and sustainable direction on its own.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. How was urban agriculture in Duluth one hundred years ago similar to urban agriculture today? How was it different?
- 2. "Rust Belt" cities like Duluth have been among the hardest-hit cities in the current economic recession. Given that urban agriculture originally developed in Duluth because of the economic hardships of many, could urban farms make a return to Duluth under the present circumstances? If yes, how would urban agriculture come into fruition?
- 3. Businesses, universities, and organizations in a similar vein to chambers of commerce were at the forefront of urban agriculture in Duluth. To what extent did urban agriculture develop either from the "top down" or the "bottom up"? How does this compare with urban agriculture today?
- 4. Consider the actions of Mr. Hostetter and the Greysolon Farms Company. What success did they have in northern Minnesota that could be replicated today? Did they make any missteps that those hoping to start urban-agriculture projects in their cities could hold as a cautionary tale?
- 5. How did the University of Minnesota bolster urban agriculture in Duluth at the turn of the last century? How do universities support urban agriculture today, and how has that changed over time?
- 6. In the 1950s, "Big Ag" began to overtake local food production, and by the 1970s Duluth's original food system was virtually dismantled. However, the Duluth Community Garden Program was founded in

- 1981. Given the rich history of urban agriculture, is urban agriculture still on the decline, or is it experiencing a renaissance?
- 7. Duluth was an exceptional urban-agriculture case because it involved collaboration from so many parts of society—particularly from business leaders. Can such collaboration occur today? Should it?

CHAPTER 3

Municipal Housekeepers and the High Cost of Living

The Establishment of Gardening Programs and Farmers Markets by Grand Rapids Women's Clubs in the Early Twentieth Century JAYSON OTTO

On March 21, 1917, Eva McCall Hamilton was quoted on the front page of the Grand Rapids Herald: "The retail market will become an institution in Grand Rapids. The turning over of vacant city lots to householders is also a splendid idea. These things show the spirit of Grand Rapids." Hamilton, who would go on to be the first female senator in Michigan, was reveling in her victory won the previous evening at Grand Rapids City Hall. That night she had used her influence as a member of the mayor-appointed High Cost of Living Commission to overcome a filibuster blocking a \$2,000 appropriation for the development of the first public retail market in Grand Rapids, Michigan.1 At the same meeting, she helped push through a resolution that gave the city comptroller power to distribute over three hundred vacant lots in the city to individuals, families, or other groups of community members wanting to grow their own food (Grand Rapids Press [GRP], 20 March 1917, 5).

Public retail markets, which are what we would now consider "farmers markets," became an institution in Grand Rapids through the work of wealthy,

Finally, we must do a better job of documenting impacts. We have many examples of how food production enhances urban life by opening up green spaces, improving soil quality and water and waste management, providing opportunities for community building, making healthy, affordable food more widely accessible, and enabling people to grow foods culturally important to them. However, in the face of ongoing skepticism about the relevance of urban agriculture, we need more systematic efforts to document these benefits, as well as potentially negative outcomes, in order to provide policy makers and practitioners with recommendations for best practices for meeting different urban food system goals.

The health and livability of a city depend on a multitude of planning decisions and the actions of local businesses, community organizations, and individual citizens. The urban-agriculture case studies we have followed show how food production in the city intersects with many different aspects of urban economic development, community development, environmental sustainability, and human health. We believe this volume provides useful examples of ways that urban agriculture fits into the fabric of the modern city, and directions for future research and innovation.

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