Greetings GFASG Members,

We are excited to be welcoming you all to the virtual 2021 American Association of Geographers Annual Meetings. We look forward to all of the thought-provoking sessions GFASG members have organized and to another year of working with all of you.

Thank you to all of the GFASG board members that have supported the specialty group’s work over the past year and the planning for the upcoming meetings. A special thank you to board members completing their terms this year: Madeleine Fairbairn (newsletter editor), Renata Blumberg (faculty-at-large), Laura Williams (student-at-large), and Kristin Reynolds (FJSAAS Liaison). We also want to express our gratitude to board members that will continue to contribute to the GFASG for another year: Megan Baumann (secretary-treasurer), Russell Hedberg (website coordinator), Christopher Bryant (faculty-at-large), and Dana James (student-at-large). Finally, a big welcome to new board members: Danny Block (faculty-at-large), Brittany Jones (FJSAAS liaison), Gwyneth Mansour (newsletter editor), and Jesse. R. Andrews (student-at-large).
Despite the virtual presence, the 2021 AAG Meeting is packed with many exciting sessions, panels, and events. This year, the GFASG is sponsoring 35 sessions. The GFASG Plenary Session will feature a conversation with Dr. Ashanté Reese (UT Austin), Dr. Estelí Jimenez (UC Santa Cruz), and Dr. Naya Jones (UC Santa Cruz) focused on “Examining systems of power in agriculture and food geographies”. Through discussing their current and forthcoming work, the speakers will address themes such as methodology, trauma, resilience, botanical knowledge in African-American & Afro-Latinx food geographies, conservation narratives and their relation to food and lives, farmworker migrant resistance in plantation contexts, and the broader implications of plantation work to the Latin American agrarian question. Please join us for this panel on April 8, 2021, 1:30-2:45pm (PDT) in Virtual 10.

If you’re interested in serving on the GFASG Executive, we will be seeking nominations for open seats a few months before the 2022 Meetings in New York. There are many ways to contribute to the GFASG, even if you are not on the Board. Every year, we need volunteers to help organize field trips, panels, and the annual mixer. If you have any thoughts on how the GFASG can best serve food systems geographers, please come to our Business Meeting or email us any time. The GFASG business meeting will be Saturday, April 10, 6:15-7:30pm (PDT), in Virtual 27. Please join us for an opportunity to get to know other members and provide your input into the GFASG’s justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work and overall plans for the upcoming year. We also welcome input via email from those unable to join the meeting.

Lastly, we are excited to announce the recipients of this year’s graduate awards, Atlanta Marinna-Grant and Lauren Asprooth (see page 8 for further details). We received a total of 11 very competitive applications featuring a range of topics from farmer adaptation to climate change to food justice and workers’ rights. Congratulations to our selected award recipients!

We look to seeing many of you in the virtual meetings this year and in-person at the 2022 AAG Meeting in New York.

In health and solidarity,

Colleen Hammelman, GFASG Chair
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**Member Achievements**

**Recent Publications**


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**Special Issue**
Radical Food Geographies
Human Geography
Volume 13 Number 3 November 2020
https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/HUG/current
Editors: Colleen Hammelman, Kristin Reynolds, and Charles Z. Levkoe

**Projects**
Aude Chesnais, PhD, Senior Researcher, Village Earth
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Much of the data about native lands and native peoples is collected and maintained by the United States Government, however much of this data is not readily available to tribes and native peoples. The purpose of the Native Land Information System (NLIS) is to compile, consolidate and visualize data and information that Indigenous people of North America need to protect their lands and resources and plan for the future. We provide open-source data from public datasets aggregated at the reservation level using GIS, and further analyzed to provide answers to long-standing questions: How much agriculture revenue was generated on native land since reservation? How much of that revenue goes to native farmers and ranchers? Can we track the quality of land throughout the history of land cessions?

Can Native people feed themselves with local production? Our tools are also meant to support the planning of sustainable native food-systems. The upcoming Native Food Sovereignty Index (NFSI 2020) is a first attempt to gather in one Index 20 indicators that together inform a healthy food-system from a culturally-appropriate perspective. Our broader goal is to empower native land through data. On the one hand, it means making public data available, and thereby challenge the BIA and other institutions to be accountable for their mismanagement of public data. On the other hand, it means questioning the very data we use and develop intertribal collaboration around what appropriate and good data looks like for communities. The site was developed by the Native Lands Advocacy Project (NLAP); a project of Village Earth, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Fort Collins, Colorado, with funding from the Indian Land Tenure Foundation.

**Honors**
Kristin Reynolds was selected as Fulbright Specialist, The Fulbright Program, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs U.S. Department of State. Her tenure runs through 2024.

**Grants and Collaborations**
Kristin Reynolds and colleagues at Bio en Grand Est (an organic agriculture and farmer education organization in Eastern France) received full funding from French regional water management agencies and the French national agricultural ministry for their 2-year project “Developing Resilience for Organic Cereal Grains in the Context of Climate Change and Protection of Water Resources: Developing Heritage Grain Cultivation and Value Chains.”

Nathan McClintock was awarded funded for “CommunoSerre : Intégration socio-technologique des serres communautaires et solidaires dans des quartiers urbains défavorisés affectés par la pandémie (2021 – 2023).” A 2-year interdisciplinary project funded by the Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS) critically examines the social and technical challenges and possibilities of incorporating community and/or social economy greenhouses in Montréal’s neighborhoods hit hardest by the pandemic.
Update from FJSAAS Community of Practice

by Kristin Reynolds, GFASG Board Member/FJSAAS Liaison and FJSAAS coordinator

The Food Justice Scholar-Activism/Activist Scholarship community of practice (FJSAAS) is a working group within the Geographies of Food and Agriculture Specialty Group focused on:

- The meaning and scalability of “food justice” (in urban and rural spaces), as both a paradigm and material goal;
- Productive questioning of the dichotomy between activist and scholar;
- Recognition of experience-based food systems expertise in a variety of settings (e.g., community; academia; policy making); and
- The potential roles of academics/academic work – geographic work in particular — in advancing food justice.

As a community of practice, our intent is to support collaboration among a broad diversity of actors in the food system, through the lens of geography, broadly-defined, and help to strengthen the integrity of both food justice scholarship and activism. Since FJSAAS began in 2014, our listserv has grown to 150 members. Participation in our monthly online meetings ranges from 10-40 participants from several countries, including India, Mexico, Canada, and the US. We are currently in a process of strategic planning to cultivate a more explicitly anti-oppression, anti-racist, and justice-oriented praxis in our collective work. This dovetails the work of the new GFASG Justice, Equity, Diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) committee. We welcome any and all comments or suggestions on this process.

In 2020 and early 2021, still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and important uprisings for racial justice, we have engaged in a number of initiatives connected to our community of practice goals including:

- Our session at this year’s online AAG meetings, “Navigating Food Systems Scholar Activism from within, and beyond the Ivory Tower: Exchanging and Strategizing Together across Geographies” will be held on April 10th from 4:40 PM / 5:55 PM (PDT). A collaboration between FJSAAS, the Agroecology Research-Action Collective (ARC), and People’s Knowledge, the session will include perspectives on food systems scholar-activism and activist-scholarship followed by a participatory discussion about successful scholar-activist/activist-scholar strategies. The session is sponsored by GFASG and is part of the conference theme “Expanding the Community of Geography” Find full details in the conference program.

- The FJSAAS community of practice is open to all. We meet regularly through video and conference calls, and in-person at the American Association of Geographers annual meetings.
- More information about FJSAAS and upcoming monthly meetings is on our webpage: https://gfasg.wordpress.com/activist-scholarship/.
- Contact us by email with questions or to join a meeting or the listserv: fjscholaractivists@gmail.com

In memory:
We were also deeply saddened at the loss of FJSAAS co-founder and steering committee member Hank Herrera who passed away after a short struggle with Covid-19 in November 2020. Hank was instrumental to the founding of the group and consistently pushed us to remain grounded in our work for food justice. While we recognize his positive contributions to shaping FJSAAS over a six-year period, we also acknowledge ways in which Hank may have caused harm to some in the food justice community. As such, in our strategic planning we are committed to reaffirming FJSAAS’s priorities of resisting oppression in all aspects of the food system, through our work as a community of practice and in concert with GFASG’s JEDI committee.

Join us!

- FJSAAS members Sahil Patni, Melody Lynch, and Kristin Reynolds published the first entry in our quarterly blog, which is posted on the Specialty Group homepage. The next issue will be out this spring. Contributions are welcome. Please email fjscholaractivists@gmail.com for details.

In memory:

The steering committee was formed in late 2020. Members are: Brittany Jones, Jessica Gilbert, Sahil Patni, Carrie Freshour, Daniel Block, and Kristin Reynolds. The committee met online for a “retreat” on March 5th to begin strategic planning and visioning for the coming months and year.
The JEDI Committee of GFASG was formed in 2020 in response to ongoing discussions and calls within the membership for enhanced planning and integration of diversity and inclusion related principles within the work of our specialty group. As such, we drafted this language after reading and learning from lists compiled by Ashante Reese; the statement from the Black Geographies Specialty Group; the work of Davis (2021) and others. This is only a first step, and we expect this language and the commitments of the JEDI Committee to evolve as more knowledges are brought into the conversation. We actively welcome feedback and ideas from the larger membership.

Description of language

**Justice:** By utilizing justice in our committee name, we signal our commitment to continuously work toward -- and be held accountable for -- creating a fairer field of academic and professional geography, food system, and world, according to the best available knowledge(s).

For example, the Specialty Group has written, signed, or provided input on a number of statements/letter that reflect JEDI principles include the following:

- COVID/Anti-Austerity letter to AAG initiated by the Socialist and Critical Geography Specialty Group
- AAG Climate Emergency Statement
- AAG Diversity Specialty Groups Response to AAG Initiatives
- GFASG Statement of Solidarity with Black Colleagues and Activists

As well, our Specialty Group reached out to the AAG Diversity & Inclusion Committee to request AAG’s endorsement of a statement, signed by 26 other academic organizations, opposing a new policy limiting the free exchange of information and ideas by academics in India.

We recognize that, while important, issuing and supporting statements is but a small gesture in confronting real injustices.

Within the GFASG’s bounds, the committee dedicates itself to challenging injustice in AAG more broadly, and highlighting the work of GFASG’s members doing such work.

**Equity:** We seek to actively promote equity, including but not limited to racial, gender, ethnic, economic and sexuality equity. We commit to promoting food and agricultural systems research that works toward the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that inhibit individuals and social groups from obtaining equal access to opportunities and resources.

**Diversity:** We all have diverse experiences and hold multiple, socially-constructed identities. We acknowledge, value, and celebrate the differences between persons, including in age, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other axes of social difference.

As one step this year, the GFASG Awards Committee requested a diversity statement as a component of graduate research awards applications, asking applicants to speak to how their research or experiences advance principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. The applicant’s engagement and experience with diversity was considered in the evaluation process along with scholarly merit, organization and clarity of the proposal, and qualifications of the student to conduct the proposed work.

**Inclusion:** We commit to creating a space of community and belonging by welcoming participation of all members and by amplifying and valuing the achievements, voices, ideas, and work of individuals and groups that are historically and currently underrepresented in academia.

We look forward to including additional members of GFASG in the work of the JEDI committee and receiving feedback from the membership on how the specialty group may work to further JEDI principles within our group and the wider AAG community. We invite any interested GFASG members to participate in the work of the JEDI Committee even if they are not on the GFASG Executive.
Who we are
Members of the JEDI Committee represent the Board of the GFASG Specialty Group. Our positionality shapes how we come to this work. We currently hold assistant and associate faculty positions, graduate student, and fellowship positions in R1, R2 and other types of universities. Several of us also represent or are engaged with civil society or grassroots organizations. Members of the Committee are white and female and recognize both the privilege afforded these positions and the worldview that we bring to developing this language and work. We also recognize that the lack of diversity in our committee and among the broader GFASG board are limitations that we aim to address in coming years.

Other readings:

Produce for sale during a 2019 tour of an agroecological farm in Greater Rosario, Argentina. Photo by Colleen Hammelman.
2021 Graduate Research Grant Recipients

Atlanta-Marinna Grant (Master's)

Atlanta is an Indigenous Masters (M.A) student in the Institute of Resources, Environment & Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, embarking on her research around traditional food systems as a tool in mitigating climate change. She will be looking at Indigenous food waste or food ’cycling’ practices in hopes of reclaiming autonomy and food sovereignty within Indigenous communities while addressing the need for stronger food waste practices within urban environments.

Lauren Asprooth (Doctoral)

A Midwestern Native, Lauren is interested in the political ecology of grain farming in the U.S. Corn Belt. After several years abroad working in international agricultural development, Lauren decided to shift focus back home to one of the most important, and at the same time unsustainable, agricultural regions in the country. As a PhD student at University of California Davis, their research focuses on the barriers and opportunities for farmer-led, bottom-up initiatives combined with top-down policy support towards creating regenerative farming systems in the Upper Midwest.
For many – myself included – the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a reflexive look at our social positions and commitments to one another. For me, as a community-engaged environmental sociologist working on issues related to agroecology and food sovereignty in Canada and Brazil, this crisis has also added new layers to my interest in the role of urban people in building sustainable food systems. Here I offer some reflections based on research in Metro Vancouver (Bowness & Wittman, 2020), where massive wealth inequality, magnificent ecological diversity, and dark colonial histories provide much food for thought.

We are what we eat
One way to approach questions about privilege and responsibility is through the lens of social metabolism (González de Molina & Toledo, 2014), or the flows of energy and resources that accumulate as the material basis of capitalist society. Social metabolism is perhaps most easily recognizable when it comes to food as a commodity. People, with copious help from non-human collaborators, cultivate the land and raise animals to create edible and tradable goods – an embodiment of nutrients, energy, and labour. Those goods make their way through the market and are eventually purchased by a consumer, ending up in a landfill (or compost pile), or hopefully, being eaten before winding up in a sewer (or composting toilet).

Cities are increasingly the final destination in this caloric migration. In much of the highly urbanized and urbanizing world, agriculture is rural, industrial, and designed to satisfy growing urban appetites. Materials and energy flow through the food system into cities, making urban consumers and cities themselves literal embodiments of the countryside. As members of the Food and Agriculture Specialty Group are aware, these urban diets have environmental consequences. Industrial agriculture causes both resource depletion and pollution that threatens ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole. There are social costs as well, made all too clear during COVID-19 as migrant farmworkers and meatpackers were further forced into life-threatening work conditions.

Who is responsible for repairing food systems’ negative externalities?
Surely those with the biggest appetites, those who have benefited most from the harms of social metabolism, have the biggest bill to foot, right? This is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the argument articulated by Doreen Massey (2004) and others, who evoke a relational understanding of responsibility. Relational responsibility transcends the here and now, holding people responsible not only for what we do, but also for who and what we are. Cities and urban people are responsible to the far-away lands and people that provide for urban sustenance. Urban people would therefore also be responsible for the harms caused in feeding cities.

To this I want to add two further points about the urban. Cities are sites of spectacular wealth. They are also highly unequal, with various forms of privilege – economic, racial, gendered, and otherwise – that intersect to shape our chances of rising or descending on the dizzying escalator of social hierarchy. Wealth and urban privilege are aspects of the social metabolism, as they depend on energy and resource flows. Therefore, in relational terms, those with privilege are proportionately responsible for the harms caused in the transformation of rural landscapes into unequal cities.
Doing what we can with what we have

I have been studying the ways that urban people act on their responsibility in protecting foodlands (including agricultural lands and traditional harvesting territories) from capital in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia – a cluster of Canadian municipalities including the City of Vancouver proper. This region is teeming with life, from marine ecosystems to deltas and wetlands to temperate rainforest to alpine ecosystems. It is also home to some of the best agricultural land and most expensive property in the country. This is all located on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Coast Salish peoples, making it a site of ongoing colonial occupation.

This is where Hannah Wittman and I have been studying what we call “urban agrarianism,” an “urban ethic of care for foodlands and, by extension, a relational responsibility to exercise solidarity with those who cultivate and harvest food.” Metro Vancouver’s urban agrarians mobilize in defense of foodlands at different scales. These include: Within the city (i.e., in the “Save the UBC Farm” campaign to stop housing development on a university campus in Vancouver); on the periphery of the city (i.e., in the fight against speculative mansion construction on legislatively-protected peri-urban farmland in Richmond, BC); beyond the city (i.e., to protect foodlands against controversial energy development projects, such as the TransMountain Pipeline Expansion, Coastal GasLink pipeline on Wet’suwet’en lands, or the Site C Hydroelectric Dam in the Peace River Valley); and against the very concept of property upon which the city is founded, which in many ways undermines Indigenous sovereignty in the region.
Over the past year, I have witnessed other instances where urban agrarians have grappled with their privilege and have mobilized their relational responsibility in pursuit of food sovereignty and food justice. For example, sessions at the Vancouver Urban Farming Forum in January 2020 focused on the theme of privilege in Vancouver’s food movement. Spaces like these are increasingly common, marking a rising place for themes around food sovereignty among community efforts to shape the food system. As another example, in January 2021 the Vancouver Food Policy Council (of which I am a member) committed to supporting organizations like the newly formed Downtown Eastside Indigenized Food Sovereignty Co-op, which has embarked on efforts to build community food security in response to the COVID-19 crisis through a number of initiatives, including by pushing for a traditional food processing hub in Vancouver. These are just some examples that illustrate the shifting reality of urban agrarianism today toward greater relational responsibility.

From responsibility to redistribution?
While (of course) urban people do not carry the entire burden of building sustainable food systems, as we argue in the paper (see Bowness & Wittman, 2020), urban people with social privilege hold the lion’s share of this responsibility. This includes the privileged positions that academics occupy, especially those of us working out of universities in the urban centres of the Global North.

Our research suggests that urban agrarians will likely continue to take stock of their privileges and act on shared responsibilities for building a better food system. With mounting social discord around wealth inequality, racial injustice, and looming environmental catastrophes, a post COVID-19 urban agrarianism may go beyond an ethic of care to become more explicitly focused on the redistribution of social privilege.

References


In the US, the rising obesity rate and obesity-related comorbidities, such as cardiovascular diseases and Type-II diabetes, have drawn health geographers’ attention. It is generally understood that the lack of access to healthy food provisioning, such as grocery stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables, is driving this obesity crisis. Under this context, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) develops an inquiry tool, the Food Access Research Atlas (1), generally known as the “food desert locator,” to highlight areas with both low-income and limited access to grocery stores. The tool also incorporates other variables, such as car-ownership, to identify communities at risk of food insecurity.

This spatial approach, however, has raised questions about the etiology of obesity. It has been found that the correlation between healthy food access and healthy diets is not statistically consistent and is somewhat insignificant (2). In order to articulate the health effects of the community food environment, health geographers argue that other non-spatial variables need to be considered. One such variable is time.

Time shapes food access in two dimensions. On the one hand, the time component, or “temporality,” manifests in the urban food system (3) — grocery stores have different opening hours, farmers’ markets operate in different seasons. For example, it is found that grocery stores in downtown Columbus, Ohio, although there are many of them, close relatively early than stores located in the suburb. This disparity in space-time access to food is visualized by a 3D Geographical Information System (GIS) (4). The plentiful spatial access but limited temporal access could be explained by the store type (e.g., mostly privately owned) and the relatively high crime rate in the downtown neighborhood. Since downtown stores have limited operating hours, local residents may restrict their food choices and could be subject to diet-related health consequences. On the other hand, time shapes individuals’ mobility to procure food. People burdened with multiple social roles, such as childcare while raising an income, may find themselves less available to procure healthy food (5). A study using a travel diary survey identifies that the difference in time use exists between genders and among different races. Full-time employed women and African Americans are at the disadvantage of having less discretionary time (6). The lack of time may victimize these vulnerable social groups and expose them to food insecurity.

Thus, food access is not only a spatial issue but also a temporal issue. Employing a spatial approach alone to evaluate food access is insufficient. Other tiers of non-spatial variables, such as time, should be factored in to produce knowledge about food access equity and justify the health effects of community food environments.

(This article was initially published as a blog post for the Food-Water-Energy Nexus in the Department of Geography at the Ohio State University. Permission was acquired to repost this article for the GFASG newsletter.)


References