

# An Expanded Understanding of the Ethical Importance of Civic Engagement in Food Sourcing Decisions at the Institutional Level

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## Abstract

Decisions about institutional food procurement take place in several public contexts, including public K-12 schools, public universities, public prisons, and hunger-relief agencies. They implicate numerous values, including animal welfare, cost, accessibility, convenience, cultural appropriateness, social acceptability, healthfulness, freshness, quality, workers' rights, localness, and environmental sustainability. Sometimes these contexts amount to democratic associations or are situated within a broader democratic context that makes democratic norms operative. Making institutional procurement decisions more fully comply with the norms of deliberative democracy can help to identify value conflicts, reduce the extent of those conflicts, and find a path to their appropriate resolution. Principled civic engagement practices can create equitable and inclusive environments in which democratic deliberation can take place. The resulting decisions can benefit in terms of legitimacy, respectfulness, and epistemic soundness.

## Ethical Questions Surrounding Food Procurement

Food procurement decisions—choices about what food to purchase and where to purchase it from—involve numerous competing values. What if the food that is more environmentally friendly is more expensive? What if the food that is the healthiest is not the tastiest and might also result in more waste? What if the food that is most convenient to buy or prepare is unhealthy? Food procurement decisions gain an additional layer of ethical complexity when they are made on behalf of others. We shall refer to such third-party procurement decisions as “institutional procurement decisions.” Our focus will be restricted to institutional procurement decisions made in public schools, public prisons, and hunger relief agencies, all contexts in which clients have limited agency.

An example illustrates some of the many complications that arise in institutional procurement decisions: Should a food pantry accept and distribute foods that are unhealthy? Studies suggest that almost two-thirds of all food pantry clients have (or are shopping for a family member who has) at least

one diet-related chronic disease.<sup>1</sup> And food insecurity itself is associated with diet-related chronic diseases.<sup>2</sup> One prime example is diabetes. People who are food insecure have more emotional and financial challenges related to managing diabetes, low self-efficacy in managing their diabetes, more ER visits for hypoglycemia,<sup>3</sup> higher average blood sugars, and increased risks of complications compared with people who are food secure.<sup>4</sup>

Although food banks and food pantries were originally intended to meet emergency food needs, many individuals and families now rely on these resources to regularly access food. A majority of food pantry clients reported using a pantry at least six times per year, one-third reported using a pantry every month, and those who reported using a pantry every month also reported visiting a pantry for an average of approximately twenty-eight consecutive months.<sup>5</sup> Food banks and pantries thus have an increasingly important role to play in the management of diet-related chronic diseases.

Recent interventions focus on providing healthy options and nutrition education through food banks. Hilary Seligman and her colleagues provided diabetes-friendly food boxes, offered screening and referrals, and conducted diabetes self-management training within the pantry setting.<sup>6</sup> Daniel Remley and his colleagues describe how some food pantries have converted to the Rainbow of Colors choice pantry model, where clients choose their foods (as opposed to being given a predetermined selection) and the foods are organized according to MyPlate food groups with integrated nutrition education programs.<sup>7</sup>

However, if a pantry limits unhealthy foods, the pantry is also limiting the autonomy of its clients. Virtually all consumers shopping at a regular grocery store probably place several unhealthy foods in their carts, which is the result of exercising their autonomy. It would be paternalistic and disrespectful to those who are food insecure to treat them as if they have less right than others to choose foods that they find preferable, even if those foods are unhealthy. The mere fact that food banks constitute public assistance does not mean that clients should have to forfeit such choices: tax breaks are also a form of public assistance, but the wealthy who receive them are not prevented from using their savings on unhealthy foods. A related reason for allowing unhealthy foods is simply that these foods are often desired and enjoyable. Health is only one aspect of well-being, after all; happiness is important, too.

Moreover, choice pantries that allow both healthy and unhealthy options provide the opportunity to educate clients about making healthy choices on their own. Pantries are only one source of food for food insecure individuals, and, hopefully, a temporary one. Choice food pantry volunteers and staff can help their clients learn how to make healthy choices. Teaching label-reading skills, for example, will help clients make decisions in grocery stores where they will be barraged with unhealthy options. Thus, accepting and distributing unhealthy foods respects clients' autonomy, makes them happy, and can offer important educational opportunities.

Thus, individuals responsible for making food procurement decisions for the pantry, and thus for the pantry's clients, face many trade-offs between a variety of ethically important values, such as health, education, autonomy, happiness, and respect. We propose that principled civic engagement with local communities, especially with end users themselves, will help identify, reduce, and resolve the value conflicts at issue in institutional procurement decisions.

1. See Amy Alwood, "Food Insecurity and Health Disparities Among a Sample of Central Ohio Food Pantry Clients," MS thesis, Ohio State University, 2014, OhioLINK (OSU1397736779).

2. See Barbara A. Laraia, "Food Insecurity and Chronic Disease," *Advances in Nutrition*, 4 (2013): 203–212; Hilary K. Seligman et al., "A Pilot Food Bank Intervention Featuring Diabetes-Appropriate Food Improved Glycemic Control Among Clients in Three States," *Health Affairs* 34, no. 11 (2015): 1956–63; Hilary K. Seligman et al., "Food Insecurity is Associated with Diabetes Mellitus: Results from the National Health Examination and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1999–2002," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 22, no. 7 (2007): 1018–23; Andrea López and Hilary K. Seligman, "Clinical Management of Food-Insecure Individuals with Diabetes," *Diabetes Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (2012): 14–18; and Nicholas T. Vozoris and Valerie S. Tarasuk, "Household Food Insufficiency Is Associated with Poorer Health," *Journal of Nutrition* 133, no. 1 (2003): 120–26.

3. See Hilary K. Seligman and Dean Schillinger, "Hunger and Socioeconomic Disparities in Chronic Disease," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 363, no. 1 (2010): 6–9.

4. See Seligman et al., "Food Insecurity"; Seligman and Schillinger, "Hunger"; and Seligman et al., "Food Insecurity and Glycemic Control."

5. See Samuel Echevarria-Cruz and Rob Santos, "Food Bank: Hunger's New Staple, Preliminary Report," *Feeding America*, 27 September 2011, <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/hungers-new-staple/or-hungers-new-staple-executive.pdf>.

6. See Seligman et al., "Pilot Food Bank Intervention."

7. See Daniel T. Remley et al., "Extension's Role in Developing 'Choice' Food Pantries in Southwest Ohio," *Journal of Extension* 44, no. 6 (2006), <https://www.joe.org/joe/2006december/lw5.php>.

## Contexts of Sourcing Decisions

Food procurement decisions are made on multiple scales, ranging from households to institutions that impact large portions of specific demographics. In the for-profit environment, a plethora of suppliers use market analyses and sales data to inform their procurement decisions, allowing consumers to “vote with their wallets.” But, in the non-profit environment, decision-makers do not always solicit the preferences and needs of clients, and options for clients to be included within the decision-making process can be limited or absent. This is particularly true in the four kinds of institutions examined in our study: public K-12 schools, public universities, public prisons, and hunger relief agencies.

The food sourcing decisions for these institutions are fraught with external barriers such as directed purchases and reliance on donated food. These create a lack of agency for the clients<sup>8</sup> and a lack of transparency on the part of the institution, which can be motivated to avoid accountability and hide questionable or downright illegal practices.<sup>9</sup> When food sourcing processes are obscure, external, or disengaged from the clients, a homogenization takes place with regard to both the food and the people who consume it:<sup>10</sup> the food is viewed through a narrow lens of caloric value and other basic nutritional factors, while the individual consumers are treated as voiceless bodies without specific needs, identities, or concerns. This devaluation of the individual has a pernicious impact on marginalized populations.<sup>11</sup>

### Public K-12 Schools

What kind of food is on the school lunch tray? This has become a question of concern from individual PTA members to the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>12</sup> The sourcing of public school food is a combination of purchased and provided items.<sup>13</sup> Begun in the 1940's, the original purpose of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was to support farmers by buying surplus production from America's agricultural industry, even though the public believes that its purpose is to feed hungry children.<sup>14</sup> This conflicted history provides a fertile ground for debates regarding the NSLP and its companion, the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Currently the K-12 public school feeding associations (SFA) are organized at a school district level, with certain aspects determined at the state level. Federal regulations pertain to student eligibility for free or reduced status and the disposition of the commodity foods (agricultural products that are not differentiated by brand), which are twelve percent of the federal education budget for any given state.<sup>15</sup> The commodity foods are determined per year, based on national food subsidy programs and the nationwide productivity of specific resources. There is variability in form and timing of this provided resource.

School districts receive both cash and in-kind benefits (in the form of commodity foods) as two forms of federal support. The value of the food received varies based on market and supply factors. These same federal benefits can be used to purchase or trade for fruits and vegetables through the Department of Defense purchasing plants.<sup>16</sup> Federal guidelines dictate nutritional values and preferences that must be given to specific types of food producers.<sup>17</sup> While some school districts opt out of the NSLP (and the SBP) to have greater freedom in sourcing food, this is not an option for schools in low-income areas whose only alternatives are insufficient taxpayer and student funds. This creates situations of inequality as less financially stable districts must take whatever foods they are given. Meal production using these resources is also an area of fiscal constraint as fewer districts are able to afford enough trained nutritionists and food preparation personnel. Limited kitch-

8. See Anna Greer et al., “Giving Economically Disadvantaged Minority Food Pantry Patron's a Voice,” *Journal of Family and Community Health* 39, no. 3 (2016): 199–206; Melissa L. Salazar, “Public Schools, Private Foods: Mexican Memories of Culture and Conflict in American School Cafeterias,” *Food and Foodways* 15, no. 3–4 (2007): 153–81; and Amy B. Smoyer, “Good and Healthy: Foodways and Construction of Identity in a Women's Prison,” *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 53, no. 5 (2014): 525–41.

9. See Vivica I. Kraak et al., “The Accountability of Public-Private Partnerships with Food, Beverage and Quick-Serve Restaurant Companies to Address Global Hunger and the Double Burden of Malnutrition,” *United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition: News*, 39 (late 2011): 11–24; Jesse McEntee and Elena Naumova, “Building Capacity Between the Private Emergency Food System and the Local Food Movement: Working Toward Food Justice and Sovereignty in the Global North,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 3, no. 1 (2012): 235–53; and Michael D. McKirgan, “Under-Regulation in the State Prison Food System,” *Journal of Food Law and Policy* 9 (2013): 275–305.

10. See Rebecca Godderis, “Dining In: The Symbolic Power of Food in Prison,” *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 45, no. 3 (2006): 255–67; and Salazar, “Public Schools.”

11. See Karen McCurdy et al., “From Poverty to Food Insecurity and Child Overweight: A Family Stress Approach,” *Child Development Perspectives* 4, no. 2 (2010): 144–51; and Janet Poppendieck, “Dilemmas of Emergency Food: A Guide for the Perplexed,” *Journal of Agriculture and Human Values* 11, no. 4 (1994): 69–76.

12. See USDA, “National School Lunch Program (NSLP),” 6 June 2017, accessed 31 August 2016, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp>.

13. See Cora Peterson, “A Rotten Deal for Schools? An Assessment of States' Success with the National School Lunch Program's In-Kind Food Benefit,” *Food Policy* 36, no. 5 (2011): 588–96.

14. See Gordon W. Gunderson, “The National School Lunch Program: Background and Development,” US Government Printing Office, 1971, number 0-429-783.

15. Peterson, “Rotten Deal,” 588.

16. Janet Poppendieck, *Free for All: Fixing Food in America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2010), 105.

17. See Christina Conell et al., “Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs,” US Department of Agriculture, 2015, FNS-465.

en personnel and equipment can restrict the SFA's ability to purchase a wide range of items while meeting nutritional and safety guidelines.<sup>18</sup>

The conundrum of school lunches falls into the intersection of a federal farmer support program and a necessary corporate agenda of financial responsibility, all while facing the moral imperative to feed hungry children in a manner that encourages healthy cognitive and physical development. In this particular subset of consumers, there is additional moral complexity because parents and caregivers stand between the children and those who are making food procurement decisions on their behalf. This renders the students even less empowered regarding their food choices.

### *Public Universities*

Public universities source food through a standard business model, purchasing food or using institutional food providers.<sup>19</sup> Both food and related services are purchased through a bidding process and standardized contractual negotiations. This creates a market environment that encourages commoditization over quality.<sup>20</sup> The end consumer, the student, is not directly involved in the process, which enhances the disconnect between the dollar value of the food and the food's nutrition, taste, or cultural value. The market demand for healthful foods or foods produced fairly, locally, or sustainably is distanced from the directly negotiating parties. Institutions can request items considered local or organic, but managing the contractual details becomes another layer of market interaction, which can increase costs. The final choice available to the students is limited in both quantity and quality while still being difficult for many students to afford. Further, many students, especially freshmen and sophomores, are limited in their access to off-campus foods and so rely heavily on meal plans. These factors leave many students with minimal agency in their own food consumption.

### *Public Prisons*

Food provisioning at state and federal prisons is largely a commercial process. Incarceration facilities request quotes for goods and services and are required by law to select the cheapest qualified bidder. This bidding process is conducted at the facility level, but the dietary requirements are created at the federal level.<sup>21</sup> The Federal Bureau of Prisons establishes a national menu, including alternative meals for religious requirements, dietary health needs, and holidays. The procurement process is highly structured and leaves little room for facilities or inmates to adjust meals for taste, size, or community identity construction.

Inmates have a minimal level of agency in their consumption habits; alternatives to the cafeteria are limited to purchasing items from the commissary, often with high prices and limited selection, and acquiring foods in an illicit barter-based "gray market." The combination of a nationally determined menu and consumers with severely restricted agency can increase tensions and violence within incarceration facilities.<sup>22</sup>

### *Hunger Relief Agencies*

Hunger relief agencies, particularly food banks and pantries, are frequently sourced through USDA commodity food programs such as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Food Supplemental Program (CFSP). Federal commodities from these programs are distributed to the states based on need and agricultural conditions. Participating hunger relief agencies must follow state and federal guidelines related to organizational status, participant eligibility, acceptable religious activities, public health, and the avoidance of coercive practices.<sup>23</sup> For example, faith-based food pantries cannot determine clients' eligibility based

18. See Poppendieck, *Free for All*, 37, 58-59, 73, 94, 116, 229, 242.

19. See National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS), "Membership Survey Task Force Report," *Campus Dining Today* (Fall/Winter 2016), accessed November 17, 2016, <https://www.nacufs.org/resources-campus-dining-today>.

20. See idem and Annie Massa, "Food for Thought, the Challenge of Healthy Eating on Campus," *USA Today*, 13 July 2012, <http://college.usatoday.com/2012/07/13/food-for-thought-the-challenge-of-healthy-eating-on-campus>.

21. US Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons, "Food Service Manual," 13 September 2011. Accessed 18 August 2016, [http://www.acfsa.org/documents/stateRegulations/Fed\\_Food\\_Manual\\_PS\\_4700-006.pdf](http://www.acfsa.org/documents/stateRegulations/Fed_Food_Manual_PS_4700-006.pdf) (USDOJ-FBP 2011).

22. See Anita Eves and B. Gesch, "Food Provision and Nutritional Implications of Food Choices Made by Young Adult Males, in a Young Offenders' Institution," *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 16, no. 3 (2003):167-79; Godderis, "Dining In"; and Smoyer, "Good and Healthy."

23. See USDA, "Food and Nutrition Program Fact Sheet," June 2016, accessed 17 October 2017, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tefap/pfs-tefap.pdf>.

on their religious views. State or regional food banks usually receive federal commodities, and then they are responsible for distributing them to local relief agencies. The banks often allow each affiliated agency to select their own commodities, to a certain extent, and they can charge minimal maintenance fees per pound to cover costs. Food banks are therefore instrumental in enforcing federal guidelines for food distribution. In some cases, food banks influence policy. In Ohio, for example, one food bank commissioned a hunger council that developed a choice pantry incentive program.<sup>24</sup>

In many communities, hunger relief agencies rely on donations from individuals or corporations either to exclusively source food or to supplement commodity foods. Cash donations are received to purchase items directly from distributors to expand variety.<sup>25</sup> Organizers, donors, administration, and staff frequently conceive of food distribution as waste management, and the motivation behind provisioning becomes less about meeting clients' needs and more about using up excess food supplies.<sup>26</sup> The perspective of some providers is that assistance is not intended to cover the essentials but rather to provide supplemental food that helps free up the client's financial assets for necessities.<sup>27</sup> The perspective of clients is often the opposite; the food is needed and there are little or no other financial assets. Some providers' skewed understanding of their mission allows them to distribute food products with marginal nutritional value and to ignore specific needs, such as medically constrained diets for chronic problems such as celiac disease, hypertension, or diabetes. Some studies have found that a limited and uncontrollable supply results in food banks being viewed as a symbolic gesture rather than a practical one.<sup>28</sup>

## Values at Stake in Food Sourcing Decisions

The literature on the values at stake in food sourcing decisions tends to analyze the topic from one of four different perspectives: sustainably produced food, local food, healthful food, or fair food. *Sustainability analyses* examine whether the food is produced in an environmentally sustainable way.<sup>29</sup> *Local food analyses* examine whether the food is sourced from a location that minimizes transportation miles and keeps them under an acceptable maximum.<sup>30</sup> *Healthful food analyses* look at the nutritional profiles of food and how they compare, for example, to federal nutritional standards for school lunches.<sup>31</sup> Finally, *fair food analyses* explore whether the food was produced in ways that fairly compensate producers and farm laborers.<sup>32</sup> These analyses capture important ethical dimensions of food procurement decisions, but institutional food sourcing decisions implicate other values as well. The list below is drawn from multiple literatures, some specific to food sourcing and others related to local food initiatives<sup>33</sup> and food supply chain management<sup>34</sup> where similar values are at stake. This literature includes both theoretical consideration of pertinent values and empirical studies of what particular communities do in fact value when deliberating about food sourcing or making individual purchasing decisions.<sup>35</sup> Our intent is to highlight the plurality of values at stake when institutions make food procurement decisions and to convey the complexity of these decisions. In the following sections we demonstrate that democratic deliberation and principled civic engagement can help address these complexities.

### Animal Welfare

Concern for animal welfare is increasing with respect to meat consumption,<sup>36</sup> with many citing the concern as an important factor in their food sourcing decisions.<sup>37</sup> Animal welfare is at stake across all stages of animal production, where cruelty should be avoided in animal housing, transport, and slaughter.<sup>38</sup> Most producers deem animal welfare concerns (along with environ-

24. See Remley et al., "Extension's Role."

25. See Feeding America, "How We Work: Food Bank Network," accessed 9 November 2016, <http://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/>.

26. See Poppendieck, "Dilemmas."

27. See Greer et al., "Economically Disadvantaged" and Valerie Tarasuk and Joan M. Eakin, "Charitable Food Assistance as Symbolic Gesture: An Ethnographic Study of Food Banks in Ontario," *Social Sciences and Medicine* 56, no. 7 (2003): 1505–15.

28. See Tarasuk and Eakin, "Charitable Food."

29. For examples of sustainability analyses, see Sharanbir S. Grewal and Parwinder S. Grewal, "Can Cities Become Self-Reliant in Food?" *Cities* 29, no. 1 (2012): 1–11; Gary Goggins and Rau Henrike, "Beyond Calorie Counting: Assessing the Sustainability of Food Provided for Public Consumption," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 112, no. 1 (2016): 257–66; and Kei Otsuki, "Sustainable Partnerships for a Green Economy: A Case Study of Public Procurement for Home-Crown School Feeding," *Natural Resources Forum* 35, no. 3 (2011): 213–22.

30. For examples of local food analyses see, Heather McGirr and Simon P. J. Batterbury, "Food in the City: Urban Food Geographies and 'Local' Food Sourcing in Melbourne and San Diego County," *Geographical Research* 54, no. 1 (2016): 3–18; and Andy Jones, "An Environmental Assessment of Food Supply Chains: A Case Study on Dessert Apples," *Environmental Management* 30, no. 4 (2002): 560–76.

31. For examples of healthful food analyses, see Emma K. Tsui et al., "Institutional Food as a Lever for Improving Health in Cities: The Case of New York City," *Public Health* 129, no. 4 (2015): 303–309; and Crystal Smith-Spangler et al., "Are Organic Foods Safer or Healthier than Conventional Alternatives: A Systematic Review," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 15, no. 5 (2012): 348–66.

32. For examples of fair food analyses, see Stephanie Barrientos and Catherine Dolan, "Transformation of Global Food: Opportunities and Challenges for Fair and Ethical Trade." In *Ethical Sourcing in the Global Food System* (London: Earthscan, 2006), edited by Stephanie Barrientos and Catherine Dolan, 1–34; and Michael J. Maloni and Michael E. Brown, "Corporate Social Responsibility in the Supply Chain: An Application in the Food Industry," *Journal of Business Ethics* 68, no. 1 (2006): 35–52.

33. See McGirr and Batterbury, "Food in the City" and Mark C. Navin, "Local Food and International Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27, no. 3 (June 2014): 349–68.

34. See Per Engelsen et al., "Food Safety, Quality and Ethics in Supply Chains: A Case Study of Informing in International Fish Distribution," in *Food and Agricultural Marketing: The Crisis of Food Brands: Sustaining Safe, Innovative and Competitive Food Supply*, edited by Martin K. Hingley, 45–63 (Abingdon, UK: Gower, 2016); Sarah Sim et al., "The Relative Importance of Transport in Determining an Appropriate Sustainability Strategy for Food Sourcing," *International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment* 12, no. 6 (2007): 422–31; and Maloni and Brown, "Corporate Social Responsibility."

35. See Stephanie B. Jilcott et al., "Association between Travel Times and Food Procurement Practices among Female Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participants in Eastern North Carolina," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 43, no. 5 (2011): 385–89.

36. Maloni and Brown, "Corporate Social Responsibility," 38–39.

37. McGirr and Batterbury, "Food in the City," 10.

38. Maloni and Brown, "Corporate Social Responsibility," 39.

mental concerns) less important than safety, quality, and labor standards, thus requiring NGOs and other civil society organizations to apply pressure on producers.<sup>39</sup> When clients agree that animal welfare is an important value in institutional procurement decisions made on their behalf, institutions can exert pressure on producers to humanely provide animal products. If that pressure is found to be ineffective, institutions can seek alternative producers who show more concern for humane care. Institutional procurement decisions, especially those that operate on a large scale, can be part of that effort.

### *Cost, Accessibility, and Convenience*

Cost, accessibility, and convenience are commonly cited constraints on institutional procurement decisions.<sup>40</sup> Even purely financial costs take on moral importance because money used to source food could have otherwise been used to protect and further other important values. Opportunity costs thus have moral implications for procurement decisions.

Accessibility and convenience are both important from any practical ethical perspective. A substantial body of literature attests to the challenge of the effects that “food deserts” (where access to affordable and healthy food is limited) have on lower-income communities, especially racial minorities in urban settings and indigenous communities.<sup>41</sup> Even when grocery stores are located in these communities, they tend to charge higher prices for a smaller selection of healthy food.<sup>42</sup> Procurement decisions that affect communities in food deserts can thus have significant impact on healthfulness and affordability. Further, convenience is an important factor in individual food consumption choices. Feelings of “time scarcity” are increasingly widespread and of particular significance to employed parents and families in poverty.<sup>43</sup> Convenience, though, is more complicated, and involves saving time as well as energy in shopping for food, learning how to prepare food, preparing food, and cleaning up after a meal is over.<sup>44</sup> Issues of convenience are especially urgent in the context of non-profit hunger relief agencies, where clients and their families may find additional time and effort expenditures extremely burdensome, given their other commitments. How communities understand and value convenience admits of multiple constructions across different contexts.

### *Cultural Appropriateness and Social Acceptability*

Providing culturally appropriate food is necessary simply to avoid waste,<sup>45</sup> but, more importantly, it is also paramount for identity construction and maintenance in some populations.<sup>46</sup> Food has long been shown to be more than simply nutritional intake.<sup>47</sup> Food and the context of its consumption constantly reify an individual's place within the social group. They illustrate social capital and express both the limits and extent of one's power.<sup>48</sup> Culturally appropriate food can be an identifier of faith and an individual's relationship with spirituality, and it can place them within an ethnic community. This component of social identity is relevant to a person's mental stability and their ability to adapt to their environmental situation.<sup>49</sup>

The cultural appropriateness of food gains greater urgency for some marginalized communities, such as for prison inmates, where the consumption of food is one of the few domains where inmates do have limited agency.<sup>50</sup> The interpersonal connections enforced by food-identity relations enhance intra-group cohesion.<sup>51</sup> Increased awareness of self and empowerment for people within marginalized communities diminishes the incidences of tension, conflict, rebellious behavior, and violence.<sup>52</sup> In school systems, explicit or implicit peer pressure can lead a young person to under-nourish or overeat rather than eat foods that are considered socially inappropriate by their peer

39. See Linda Fulponi, “Private Voluntary Standards in the Food System: The Perspective of Major Food Retailers in OECD Countries,” *Food Policy* 31, no. 1 (2006): 1–13.

40. McGirr and Batterbury, “Food in the City,” 10; see also Faiza Khan and Caroline Prior, “Evaluating the Urban Consumer with Regard to Sourcing Local Food: A Heart of England Study,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 34, no. 2 (2010): 161–68.

41. See Renée E. Walker et al., “Disparities and Access to Healthy Food in the United States: A Review of Food Deserts Literature,” *Health & Place* 16, no. 5 (2010): 876–84; and USDA, “Go to the Atlas,” accessed 16 May 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas>.

42. See Jennifer L. Walker et al., “Household Food Insecurity Is Inversely Associated with Social Capital and Health in Females from Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Households in Appalachian Ohio,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 107, no. 11 (2007): 1989–93.

43. See Jennifer Jabs and Carol M. Devine, “Time Scarcity and Food Choices: An Overview,” *Appetite* 47, no. 2 (2006): 196–204.

44. See Marylyn Carrigan et al., “Managing Routine Food Choices in UK Families: The Role of Convenience Consumption,” *Appetite* 47, no. 3 (2006): 872–83.

45. See Cecilia Vega, “Food Banks Cater to Immigrant Taste / Adapting Menus for a Diverse Bay Area,” *San Francisco Chronicle* 20 June 2004, SFGATE, accessed 17 October 2017, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Food-banks-cater-to-immigrant-taste-Adapting-2712529.php>.

46. See Godderis, “Dining In”; Salazar, “Public Schools”; Smoyer, “Good and Healthy”; and Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1991).

47. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984, first published 1979), 169–225; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 34–36; Godderis, “Dining In”; and Visser, *Rituals*.

48. See Eves and Gesch, “Food Provision”; Smoyer, “Good and Healthy”; and Walker et al., “Household Food Insecurity.”

49. See Mariana Chilton and Donald Rose, “A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States,” *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 7 (July 2009): 1203–11; Godderis, “Dining In”; and Heather A. Okvat and Alex J. Zautra, “Community Gardening: A Parsimonious Path to Individual, Community, and Environmental Resilience,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 47, no. 3–4 (2011): 374–87.

50. See Eves and Gesch, “Food Provision”; Godderis, “Dining In”; and Smoyer, “Good and Healthy.”

51. See Maria Elisa Christie, “Kitchenspace, Fiestas, and Cultural Reproduction in Mexican Household Gardens,” *Geographical Review* 94, no. 3 (July 2004): 368–90; and Salazar, “Public Schools.”

52. See Godderis, “Dining In” and Okvat and Zautra, “Community Gardening.”

group.<sup>53</sup> Culturally appropriate food sourcing decisions can thus be an important factor in the behavioral outcomes of marginalized populations.

The source of the food individuals consume is relevant to the value and appropriateness of that food. Many public institutions source food through donations, surpluses, or different systems of food waste control.<sup>54</sup> As discussed above, sourcing for already marginalized populations, such as food pantry users, is currently managed through a food disposal framework rather than a food procurement perspective. This paradigm, while useful from a material handling aspect, can be detrimental to the populations that receive the food.<sup>55</sup> Further, leftover, cast off, and unwanted food is frequently perceived as less valuable. In our experience working with marginalized populations, these practices convey to stakeholders that they too are leftover, cast off, and unwanted. Consumption of non-market foods decreases the value that these individuals place on themselves.<sup>56</sup> These feelings can contribute to depression, anxiety, and violent behaviors.<sup>57</sup>

### Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability can be understood as using environmental resources in a way that preserves, to the best of our ability, as much environmental value for future generations as we ourselves have.<sup>58</sup> Sustainability is important from numerous different ethical perspectives, including anthropocentric perspectives that focus exclusively on human impacts and non-anthropocentric perspectives that do not.<sup>59</sup> Because food sourcing decisions (especially for food products derived from animals)<sup>60</sup> can be responsible for significant environmental impacts,<sup>61</sup> sustainability is an important value implicated by those decisions.

The environmental impact of sourcing locally has been a matter of some controversy,<sup>62</sup> but it is clear that the environmental impacts of transportation of at least some foods account for a significant percentage of their total environmental impact.<sup>63</sup> But foods that are distributed locally or in other environmentally conscientious ways can still have significant environmental impacts.<sup>64</sup> Consumers may prefer animal-based diets that pollute the environment and contribute to climate change, or they may prefer produce that is not in season locally and requires environmentally costly shipping. Fresh produce may be healthier, but fresh produce also carries environmental costs when out of season, just as diets that feature more fish may be healthier but require further depletion of sensitive fisheries.<sup>65</sup> Organizations can encourage innovations through supply-chain management decisions that encourage practices that produce and distribute healthy foods in a sustainable way.<sup>66</sup>

### Healthfulness, Freshness, and Quality

Some institutions, such as public schools, are required to follow nutritional guidelines for sourcing if they receive federal subsidies. Others, such as food pantries and soup kitchens, are not. Food sourcing decisions within institutions operating without guidelines are often influenced by constituent demands for healthfulness, freshness, and quality but constrained by seasonality, procurement opportunities, cost, and other logistical factors. Freshness of produce is a quality strongly desired by many consumer groups, especially immigrants.<sup>67</sup> For example, many Central American immigrants are not accustomed to using canned vegetable or tomato products in a choice pantry setting.<sup>68</sup> Another reason for sourcing fresh food is to accommodate clients who might not have, for example, can openers, microwaves, or freezers.

Although freshness might be preferred and culturally demanded, it offers logistical challenges in terms of cost and storage. If a pantry is only open once a week, it is pressured to give away fresh produce even if clients do not need

53. See Salazar, "Public Schools," 160, 163, 167, 173–174.

54. See Ucheoma Akobundu et al. "Vitamins A and C, Calcium, Fruit, and Dairy Products Are Limited in Food Pantries," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 104, no. (2004): 811–813; Chantelle Bazerghi et al., "The Role of Food Banks in Addressing Food Insecurity: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Community Health* 41, no. 4 (2016): 732–40; Jessica S. Rochester et al., "Assessing Foodshelves' Ability to Distribute Healthy Foods to Foodshelf Clients," *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* 6, no. 1 (2011): 10–26; Timothy J. Rush et al., "Food Insecurity and Dietary Intake of Immigrant Food Bank User," *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* 68, no. 2 (2007): 73–78; and Heidi Verpy et al., "Attitudes and Behaviors of Food Donors and Perceived Needs and Wants of Food Shelf Clients," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 35, no. 1 (2003) 6–15.

55. See Bazerghi, "Role of Food Banks"; Michele Bell et al., "Nutritional Status of Persons Using a Local Emergency Food System Program in Middle America," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 98, no. 9 (1998): 1031–33; Patricia A. Duffy et al., "Diet Quality Is Low Among Female Food Pantry Clients in Eastern Alabama," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 41, no. 6 (2009): 414–19; and Caislin L. Firth et al., "Female Inmates with Diabetes: Results from Changes in a Prison Food Environment," *Women's Health Issues Journal* 25, no. 6 (2015): 732–38.

56. See McCurdy et al., "Poverty to Food Insecurity" and Greer et al., "Economically Disadvantaged."

57. See McCurdy et al., "Poverty to Food Insecurity" and Godderis, "Dining In."

58. See Brian Barry, "Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 45, no. 89 (June 1997): 43–65.

59. See Brian G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (Summer 1984): 131–48; and Donald Scherer, "Sustainable Resource Ethics," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, edited by Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 334–58.

60. See FAO, "Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options," FAO: Rome, 2006, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/climatechange/doc/FAO%20report%20executive%20summary.pdf>.

61. See Jones, "Environmental Assessment."

62. See Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States," *Environmental Science & Technology* 42, no. 10 (2008): 3508–13.

63. See Jones, "Environmental Assessment," 570, 571, 575.

64. See Martin C. Heller et al., "Toward a Life Cycle-Based, Diet-level Framework for Food Environmental Impact and Nutritional Quality Assessment: A Critical Review," *Environmental Science & Technology* 47, no. 22 (2013): 12632–47.

65. Heller et al., "Life Cycle-Based," 12634–35.

66. See Raffaella Cagliano et al., *Organizing Supply Chain Processes for Sustainable Innovation in the Agri-Food Industry* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2016).

67. See Yoosun Park et al., "Hispanic Immigrant Women's Perspective on Healthy Foods and the New York City Retail Food Environment: A Mixed-method Study," *Social Science & Medicine* 73, no. 1 (2011), 13–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.04.012>.

68. Remley et al., "Extension's Role."

or want it. Fresh, off-season produce might be more expensive than canned or frozen,<sup>69</sup> even though many experts would argue that there may be no nutritional difference between canned and frozen food.<sup>70</sup> However, some canned fruits and vegetables, and some frozen foods, come with hidden sodium, fat, and sugar. Nutrition education might be necessary to help individuals read labels or learn how to prepare canned or frozen products more healthfully. Institutions might also have to respond to constituent demand for gluten-free, GMO free, organic, or locally-sourced food because they are perceived to be healthier or higher quality in other regards.<sup>71</sup>

When it comes to quality, food safety is also a consideration when sourcing food. Although food banks that accept USDA commodity foods have food safety guidelines<sup>72</sup> many independent food pantries do not. While the decision not to accept and distribute high-risk food items would seem like an easy one, food safety is not always a black and white issue in many food insecure communities. Food items normally considered to be high-risk—such as dented or expired canned foods or custom processed game meats—may still have a low risk of causing foodborne illness and may be acceptable to clients who have few alternatives.

Finally, because two-thirds of adults and almost one-third of children are overweight,<sup>73</sup> institutional sourcing decisions are often influenced by the moral obligation to offer more healthy choices and less junk food. However, as indicated above, healthfulness concerns can conflict with respecting autonomy. There can also be logistical challenges to provider-community relationships when food donations are rejected, whether for health, food safety, or food quality reasons.

### Localness

The push for locally produced foods has been a growing factor in individual food sourcing decisions.<sup>74</sup> Sourcing locally is often done for the purposes of “stimulating the rural economy, increasing community cohesion, linking rural and urban areas, ... reducing food miles, ... supporting healthy lifestyles, promoting local food culture and tourism, and improving the understanding of rural economies.”<sup>75</sup> However, the rise of “locavorism” risks harming poor farmers in developing countries who are dependent on export markets for their agricultural production. Local sourcing can thus be in tension with responsible and fair international trade.<sup>76</sup>

While localness is a key theme in individual purchasing decisions and a factor in some institutional contexts,<sup>77</sup> supporting local communities and food cultures has not been a significant focus of responsible food supply chain management.<sup>78</sup> Because public institutions often approach sourcing from the perspective of supply chain management, deliberations about institutional food sourcing decisions implicate the values at stake in sourcing locally.

### Workers' Rights

Issues such as fair compensation for workers, the legal status of workers, workplace safety and sanitation, workplace discrimination, opportunities for education and advancement, and recognition of collective bargaining and other workers' rights may all bear on food sourcing decisions.<sup>79</sup> Multi-stakeholder initiatives in the US and the UK have articulated certifications that pertain to labor standards.<sup>80</sup> US Social Accountability International requires that certified organizations prohibit child labor and forced or compulsory labor, provide for health and safety, recognize freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, prohibit discrimination in all facets of the workplace, and offer workers many other protections.<sup>81</sup> The UK Ethical Trading Initiative encourages compliance with a code with similar require-

69. See Steven R. Miller and William A. Knudson, “Nutrition and Cost Comparisons of Select Canned, Frozen, and Fresh Fruits and Vegetables,” *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 8, no. 6 (2014): 430–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827614522942>.

70. See Joy C. Rickman et al., “Nutritional Comparison of Fresh, Frozen and Canned Fruits and Vegetables. Part 1. Vitamins C and B and Phenolic Compounds,” *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 87, no. 6 (December 2006): 930–44, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsfa.2825>; Joy C. Rickman et al., “Nutritional Comparison of Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Fruits and Vegetables. Part 2. Vitamin A and Carotenoids, Vitamin E, Minerals and Fiber,” *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 87, no. 7 (2007): 1185–96, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsfa.2824>; and USDA, Beltsville Nutrition Research Center: Nutrient Data Laboratory, accessed 1 October 2017, <https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/beltsville-md-bhnrc/beltsville-human-nutrition-research-center/nutrient-data-laboratory>.

71. See Renée S. Hughner et al., “Who Are Organic Food Consumers? A Compilation and Review of Why People Purchase Organic Food,” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 6, no. 2–3 (2007): 94–110; Smith-Spangler et al., “Organic Foods”; Stephanie Watson, “Organic Food No More Nutritious than Conventionally Grown Food,” *Harvard Health Blog* 5 September 2012, <http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/organic-food-no-more-nutritious-than-conventionally-grown-food-201209055264>; Jessica R. Biesiekierski et al., “No Effects of Gluten in Patients with Self-Reported Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity After Dietary Reduction of Fermentable, Poorly Absorbed, Short-Chain Carbohydrates,” *Gastroenterology* 145, no. 2 (2013): 320–28; and Angelika Hilbeck et al., “No Scientific Consensus on GMO Safety,” *Environmental Sciences Europe* 27, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-014-0034-1>.

72. See Feeding America, “Ensuring Food Safety,” accessed 9 November 2016, <http://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/how-we-work/securing-meals/food-safety.html>.

73. See Cynthia L. Ogden et al., “Prevalence of Obesity and Trend in Body Mass Index among US Children and Adolescents, 1999–2010,” *Journal of American Medical Association* 307, no. 5 (2012): 483–90.

74. See Khan and Prior, “Urban Consumer” and McCir and Batterbury, “Food in the City.”

75. Khan and Prior, “Urban Consumer,” 161.

76. Navin, “Local Food.”

77. See UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, “Institutional Sustainable Food Procurement,” *What is Sustainable Agriculture?* UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, <http://asi.ucdavis.edu/programs/sarep/what-is-sustainable-agriculture/practices/institutional-sustainable-food-procurement>.

78. See Maloni and Brown, “Corporate Social Responsibility.”

79. See Maloni and Brown, “Corporate Social Responsibility.”

80. Barrientos and Dolan, “Transformation,” 14–16.

81. See Social Accountability International, *Social Accountability 8000: International Standard* (New York: SAI, 2014).



ments.<sup>82</sup> Issues of workers' rights are a significant value raised by institutional procurement decisions that involve supply chain management.

### *Additional Values in How Decisions Are Made: Agency, Autonomy, and Empowerment*

Though the aforementioned values can be understood as qualities of food (e.g. whether it is nutritious, or affordable) or food production (e.g. whether it is produced sustainably, or whether workers are fairly compensated in food production), food systems scholars have also attended to the ways that food sourcing decisions promote agency, autonomy, and empowerment.<sup>83</sup> At a broad level, food sovereignty movements have championed communal control of food systems as vital to justice.<sup>84</sup> These values are also at the center of movements that recognize dietary choices as constitutive of identity<sup>85</sup> and of a "food citizenship" that goes beyond market-driven and state-dictated food practices to include participation in democratic food networks such as consumer cooperatives and buying groups organized around sustainability, the environment, and localness.<sup>86</sup> Others have pointed out that the subjects of food systems research are frequently disempowered by the sorts of unidirectional studies cited throughout this article and that researchers should employ participatory research methods to subvert this tendency.<sup>87</sup>

As noted in the opening section, institutional procurement decisions can undermine autonomy when institutional actors make decisions for individuals who are unable to influence those institutions but depend on them nonetheless. When individuals are allowed or encouraged to produce or prepare the foods they consume, there is a feeling of agency.<sup>88</sup> There can be an increase in consumption of fruits and vegetables when the consumers are also the producers.<sup>89</sup>

The importance of food consumption to one's identity is heightened in situations of severely limited situational empowerment. In public schools in Italy and the UK, institutional actors recognize that procurement decisions should empower students to engage in enlightened food choices where the values at stake in their decisions (environmental sustainability, local production) are transparent.<sup>90</sup> In intensely controlled environments, food consumption may be the only opportunity an individual has to exercise significant control over his or her body or identity. In prisons, for example, feelings associated with food consumption can lead to behavioral outbursts. In women's prisons there is a system of non-standard cooking practices that creates cohesion and stability for the inmates. The women are able to form "families," which allow them to increase coping strategies, providing immediate benefits to them and decreasing control costs within these institutions because of a reduction in inmate tension.<sup>91</sup> After the period of confinement (in the case of inmates) or of education (in the case of students), individuals who played an active role in food preparation are better able to adapt to their subsequent, less controlled environments.<sup>92</sup>

## The Ethical Importance of Public Deliberation

We propose that principled civic engagement will help identify, reduce, and resolve conflicts between values such as the ones articulated above that arise in institutional procurement decisions in the contexts of public K-12 education, public prisons, and food relief agencies. For example, public institutions, such as universities, may confront value conflicts when they must choose between local food produced unsustainably or sustainable ingredients produced farther away, while public institutions such as emergency food pantries may need to choose between healthier foods and foods that are more convenient for their clients.

82. Barrientos and Dolan, "Transformation," 15.

83. See Henk Renting et al., "Building Food Democracy: Exploring Civic Food Networks and Newly Emerging Forms of Food Citizenship," *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19, no. 3 (2012): 289–307.

84. See Raj Patel, "Food Sovereignty," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 663–706.

85. See Christopher Ciochetti, "Veganism and Living Well," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 24, no. 3 (2012): 405–17.

86. See Renting et al., "Building Food Democracy."

87. See Adam M. Pine and Rebecca de Souza, "Including the Voices of Communities in Food Insecurity Research: An Empowerment-based Agenda for Food Scholarship," *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 3, no. 4 (2013): 71–79.

88. See Mary M. Flynn et al., "A Six-Week Cooking Program of Plant-Based Recipes Improves Food Security, Body Weight, and Food Purchases for Food Pantry Clients," *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* 8, no. 1 (2013): 73–84; Greer et al., "Economically Disadvantaged"; Okvat and Zautra, "Community Gardening"; and Smoyer, "Good and Healthy."

89. See Katherine Alaimo et al., "Fruit and Vegetable Intake Among Urban Community Gardeners," *Journal of Nutritional Education and Behavior* 40, no. 2 (2008): 94–101; and Mary Beth Pudup, "It Takes a Garden: Cultivating Citizen Subjects in Organized Garden Projects," *Geoforum* 39, no. 3 (2009): 1128–40.

90. See Kevin Morgan and Roberta Sonnino, "Empowering Consumers: The Creative Procurement of School Meals in Italy and the UK," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 31, no. 1 (2006): 19–25.

91. Firth et al., "Female Inmates," 530.

92. See Peggy C. Giordano et al., "Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 4 (January 2002): 990–1064; and Shadd Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

Civic engagement around food system issues is widespread, assuming it is construed broadly to include the efforts of academics and practitioners to solicit the opinions and perspectives of food insecure populations through surveys and questionnaires.<sup>93</sup> Such investigations are vital but they represent only one small aspect of a deliberative approach that truly engages the public.

The literature on deliberative democracy provides at least four kinds of reasons to value civic engagement. First, some institutions engaged in sourcing decisions are themselves democratic associations, understood as associations governed by the public deliberations of their members.<sup>94</sup> Second, many institutions engaged in sourcing decisions, while not themselves democratic associations, are nonetheless situated within a broader democratic context that makes democratic norms and principles operative. Even though the clients of a food bank, for example, are not literally electoral constituents of those responsible for sourcing decisions, the clients may nevertheless reasonably feel that they are the “moral constituents” of the decision-makers; that is, they are the people to whom the decision-makers are morally, if not legally, accountable to and responsible for.<sup>95</sup> Third, so-called secondary institutions, organizations that stand between individuals and the democratic state, have the potential to undermine or further the values of the democracy in which they are situated.<sup>96</sup> It can therefore be important for such institutions to adopt methods of governance and decision-making that comport well with such democratic norms as popular sovereignty, civic engagement, and political equality.<sup>97</sup> Finally, as we shall now argue, many of the reasons for public deliberation within a democracy also support civic engagement in sourcing decisions, regardless of whether these sourcing decisions are situated within a democracy or not; these reasons are important in a way that is not restricted to formal or even informal democratic contexts. In particular, by encouraging sourcing decisions to more fully comply with and exemplify democratic norms and values, the institutional sourcing decisions that are made can benefit in terms of moral legitimacy, mutual respectfulness, and epistemic soundness.<sup>98</sup>

The most common way of organizing arguments for (or against) deliberative democracy is to distinguish between instrumental and intrinsic arguments. Instrumental arguments appeal to the ways in which deliberative democracy results in better outcomes. Such arguments are sometimes referred to as epistemic arguments, in the sense that deliberative democracy is more likely to produce decisions that track the truth about what the common good is or what the will of the people is, when compared to the decisions made by other modes of governance. In contrast, intrinsic arguments appeal to the ways in which deliberative democracy is valuable in and of itself, independently of the outcomes it produces.

Pure *instrumentalists* believe that a method of governance is justified by, and only by, the quality of the outcomes that it produces. Pure *proceduralists* believe that a method of governance is justified by, and only by, its intrinsic value. We reject these extremes in favor of an intermediate view according to which both valuable outcomes and the procedure’s intrinsic values are relevant. Viewing the value of decision-making as purely instrumental ignores the fact that, in these contexts, decisions are being made that place constraints on competent, autonomous adults who reasonably value having a voice in the decision-making process itself, either directly or through appropriate representation.<sup>99</sup> Viewing the value of decision-making as purely procedural fails to recognize that the outcomes of these decisions affect the well-being of people other than the decision-makers themselves.

As an example, consider the value of fairness. A decision-making procedure can be evaluated in terms of its fairness, but so can the procedure’s outcome.

93. See Jennie L. Hill et al., “Does Availability of Physical Activity and Food Outlets Differ by Race and Income? Findings from an Enumeration Study in a Health Disparate Region,” *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 9, no. 105 (2012): 1–10; Janna A. Hirsch and Amy Hillier, “Exploring the Role of the Food Environment on Food Shopping Patterns in Philadelphia, PA, USA: A Semiquantitative Comparison of Two Matched Neighborhood Groups,” *International Journal of Environmental Research* 10 (2013): 295–313, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10010295>; Sharon Kirkpatrick and Valarie Tarasuk, “Assessing the Relevance of Neighborhood Characteristics to Household Food Security of Low-income Toronto Families,” *Public Health Nutrition* 12, no. 7 (2010): 1139–48; Kathryn T. Morrison et al., “Mapping Spatial Variation in Food Consumption,” *Applied Geography* 31, no. 4 (2011): 1262–67; Chery Smith and Hannah Miller, “Assessing the Food Systems in Urban and Rural Minnesotan Communities,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 43, no. 6 (2011): 492–504; Renée E. Walker et al., “Factors Influencing Food Buying Practices in Residents of a Low-Income Food Desert and a Low-Income Food Oasis,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 5, no. 3 (2011): 247–67.

94. See Josh Cohen, “Democracy and Liberty,” in *Deliberative Democracy*, edited by Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 185–231.

95. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “Deliberating about Bioethics,” *The Hastings Center Report* 27, no. 3 (1997), 37–38.

96. See Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, “Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance,” *Politics & Society* 20, no. 4 (1992): 393–472.

97. *Ibid.*, 395.

98. Gutmann and Thompson, “Deliberating,” 41.

99. Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 23.

A procedure that systematically excludes people from decisions that govern important aspects of their lives merely because of their race or ethnicity has an unfair procedure; an outcome in which people receive less of some public resource merely because of their race or ethnicity has an unfair outcome. Including these excluded voices in the decision-making process can result in a more fair procedure, thus providing an intrinsic reason to prefer the more inclusive procedure, even if the decisions made are ultimately the same. But this more inclusive procedure could also, in turn, result in a more fair outcome, for example, when the inclusion of more voices results in a more equitable distribution of resources. In this case, the fact that the more inclusive procedure is more fair and the fact that the outcome is more fair are both reasons to prefer the more inclusive procedure.

We begin by reviewing the instrumental arguments in favor of deliberative democracy, and the public deliberation to which it gives pride of place.

### *Instrumental Arguments in Favor of Deliberative Democracy*

Although it is essential to theories of *deliberative* democracy that public participation goes beyond a merely aggregative conception of majoritarian voting, voting still plays an ineliminable role in deliberative democracy as the final arbiter when deliberation fails to produce unanimity. Instrumentalist arguments in favor of voting include the following. Voting has the potential to improve the epistemic aspects of decision-making in certain contexts where more people are more likely to make a better decision than fewer.<sup>100</sup> In matters of aesthetic or cultural preferences, using informal voting procedures, such as non-binding ballots or surveys, can help institutional sourcing decisions better match client preferences. Voting also gives people the power to evict elected officials in clear cases of incompetence or abuse, and the power to improve the behavior of those currently in power through the threat of eviction.<sup>101</sup> Even in the absence of worries about incompetence or abuse, giving interested parties a place at the table can have the instrumental benefit of offsetting the natural tendency of people to discount the interests of others, especially when the others have no political mechanism by which to hold decision-makers accountable.<sup>102</sup>

And even supposing that decision-makers are fully motivated to take account of the interests of others, including those people in the decision-making process can still expand the available base of knowledge about and understanding of those interests and how they might be affected by the options under consideration.<sup>103</sup> Deliberation with clients can bring to bear new information about, for example, the cultural appropriateness of sourced food or the convenience of preparing sourced food. While traditional food pantries offer clients a fixed inventory of foods, choice pantries offer clients a direct role in deciding which of the available foods best fit their needs. Using regular surveys, or asking clients informally, a choice pantry can communicate with its community partners to provide food and services that more closely match what their clients need or prefer. This can reduce waste, promote the autonomy of the pantry's clients, and lead to greater preference-satisfaction among clients. To the extent, then, that a decision-making procedure should be evaluated instrumentally by how well it promotes the common good, which is at least partly constituted by the satisfaction of people's individual interests, there are several instrumental reasons for including those people whose interests could be affected in the deliberative process.

The above instrumental advantages apply even when taking the interests of affected parties as given and immutable. But the instrumental quality of deliberations can also be improved through its so-called "educative effects," its transformative effects on people's interests, or, at a deeper level, on their sense of self.<sup>104</sup> Deliberating with others, openly and publicly, can affect one's

100. See Christian List and Robert E. Goodin, "Epistemic Democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet Jury Theorem," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (2001): 277–306.

101. See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2013, first published 1942); and John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1962, first published 1861).

102. Mill, *Considerations*, 59–60, 170.

103. See Mill, *Considerations*, 262; and Jason Reece et al., *Social Capital and Equitable Neighborhood Revitalization on Columbus' Southside* (Columbus, OH: The Kirwan Institute, 2014).

104. See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Mill, *Considerations*; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelley, trans. Roger D. Masters, Judith Bush, and Christopher Kelley (Hanover: UP of New England, 1992, first published 1762).

interests and one's understanding of oneself by exposing falsehoods and fallacies in one's own self-conception, by building social empathy, and by exposing one to new perspectives. The difficulty and awkwardness of publicly pursuing selfish preferences in the context of a debate ostensibly about the common good can make one realize the selfishness of those preferences and subsequently disavow them; similarly, paying lip-service to the interests of others or to the common good can lead a greater appreciation of them even if initially done only for selfish or parochial reasons.<sup>105</sup> This will, arguably, have a positive impact on the outcomes of deliberation, and so will be instrumentally useful.

### *Intrinsic Arguments in Favor of Deliberative Democracy*

While many agree that deliberative democracy is instrumentally valuable in those ways, there are also good reasons to think that democratic deliberation is intrinsically valuable in its own right. Civic engagement is a constitutive aspect of what it is for a human being to live a good life: the development and exercise of the kinds of qualities at work in reasoned deliberation in a forum that expresses mutual respect for others are themselves an important component of our good and so are themselves a part of the common good that the government should aim to promote.<sup>106</sup>

After over a decade of working in marginalized communities across the US, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity has identified six principles for guiding civic engagement that empowers communities along these lines: embracing the gifts of diversity, realizing the role of race, power, and injustice, radical hospitality, invitation and listening, trust-building and commitment, honoring dissent and embracing protest, and adaptability to community change. When practiced, these principles structure dialogue that can improve the efficacy of engagement and lead to transformative change.<sup>107</sup> For example, the principle of realizing the role of race, power, and injustice in hunger relief contexts leads people to consider the role played by race and racial tension, policies of division (such as redlining and the use of racially restrictive covenants), and power dynamics in a specific community. This heightened appreciation can influence the civic engagement environment and enable people to expand conversations related to these issues, which clearly impact agency. This increased agency leads to the building of social capital (in the form of building and strengthening relationships within groups as well as among diverse groups), inclusive engagement activities, and the creation of knowledge.<sup>108</sup> Civic engagement activities, even those performed in the pursuit of other goals, can thus help build relationships, both among groups and within groups, that are strategically useful in achieving other important goals but are also intrinsically valuable.<sup>109</sup>

Other intrinsic reasons to prefer that decision-making include a process of public deliberation stem from the relationship between public deliberation and issues of rights and justice. In John Stuart Mill's view, it is a "personal injustice" to be denied the privilege of having a say in affairs that concern everyone.<sup>110</sup> Having the right to vote is considered intrinsically valuable because it is a minimal way of giving people a voice as well a share of the political power determining the rules under which they will have to live. This right to democratic participation has been grounded in the individual right to self-government<sup>111</sup> and in the importance of the "mutual respect and concern among citizens...demanded by justice."<sup>112</sup>

Finally, deliberative democracy is thought to be intrinsically important because of its conceptual relationship to democratic legitimacy. As expressed by Joshua Cohen, "The fundamental idea of democratic, political legitimacy is that the authorization to exercise state power must arise from the *collective decisions* of the equal members of a society that are governed by that

105. See James Bohman, "Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (1998), 402; Jon Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory," in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, edited by James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 3–33; and Mill, *Considerations*, 169–70.

106. See Mill, *Considerations*, 72–74; Thomas Christiano, "Is the Participation Argument Self-Defeating?" *Philosophical Studies* 82, no. 1 (April 1996): 1–12; and David O. Brink, *Mill's Progressive Principles* (Oxford UP, 2013).

107. Kip Holley et al., *The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement* (Columbus, OH: Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity, 2016).

108. See Reece et al., *Social Capital* and Holley et al., *Principles*.

109. See Reece et al., *Social Capital*.

110. Mill, *Considerations*, 170–71, 176.

111. Thomas Christiano, "Democracy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/democracy>.

112. Thomas Christiano, "The Significance of Public Deliberation," in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, edited by James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 245; see also Gutmann and Thompson, *Deliberative Democracy*, 3–4 and "Deliberating," 22–21, 40–41.

power.”<sup>113</sup> What is it, though, for a decision to be a collective decision of the equal members of a society? According to the deliberative conception of democracy, a decision is a collective decision of equal members of a society when it is the result of their reasoning and when that reasoning meets certain ideals of public deliberation among free and equal citizens. For example, decision-making should take place in conditions that promote transparency and appeal to considerations of values, such as the common good or justice, that can reasonably be accepted by everyone and that are consistent with the moral equality of all persons. Thus, to the extent that institutional decisions are made in ways that fall short of those ideals, the decisions amount to one group imposing its rule upon another group rather than collective self-rule.

## An Expanded Understanding of the Importance of Democratic Deliberation on Food Sourcing Decisions

The previous discussion of deliberative democracy suggests a multitude of ways in which principled civic engagement could be used to improve institutional food sourcing decisions. Fraud and incompetency can be prevented or challenged by giving clients more decision-making power. Decision-making groups in charge of public K-12 food policies can include representation from parents, acting as surrogate decision makers for their children. Institutional groups in charge of procurement policies or day-to-day decisions for food banks, pantries, prisons or public universities can have client representation to add to the knowledge available for decision-making, to help ensure that clients' interests are understood, appreciated, and promoted, and to give people a voice in the decisions that govern an important aspect of their lives. Some seats could be allocated by voting procedures implemented among the institution's clients and some sourcing decisions can be made through a directly democratic process that gives clients formal voting privileges. Clients can be more involved in and have more of a say over production decisions and practices in contexts ranging from public prisons<sup>114</sup> to public K-12 schools.<sup>115</sup> More broadly, principled civic engagement can help to empower the community and improve relationships between and among different populations, particularly when successfully utilized to promote equity among participants. The Kirwan principles identified above are one way to help promote and sustain conditions under which such principled civic engagement can occur.

Some institutions responsible for food procurement decisions, of course, already practice principled civic engagement in a robust fashion; in fact, there are food pantries that currently exist *because* of principled civic engagement. We close with a final example of a food pantry that exemplifies many of the virtues of principled civic engagement we have identified. This pantry was founded over a decade ago by community members who were part of a growing, suburban Hispanic population and is run by an interfaith coalition out of a church. Unlike most other hunger relief agencies in its area, this pantry is not part of a large network of partner agencies. Excluding itself from this network has benefits and drawbacks. The pantry does not have the same access to fresh and free produce as members of the network do, nor does it have access to the major grocer in the area, but it consequently does not have to follow the requirements that the network sets for their clients to be eligible to receive services. For example, network pantries are severely restricted in how often they can allow clients to visit the pantry during a month, but clients at this pantry are able to come any or every time it is open.

Because of the pantry's roots as an immigrant pantry, it keeps few records and the records it does keep are all hand-written on paper to help protect its clients from possible Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) ac-

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113. Cohen, "Democracy and Liberty," 185. Emphasis in the original.

114. See Nancy Flinn, *The Prison Garden Book* (South Burlington, VT: National Gardening Association, 1985); Mark Sandel, "Therapeutic Gardening in a Long-Term Detention Setting," *Journal for Juvenile Justice Services* 19, no. 1&2 (2004): 123-31; James Jiller, *Doing Time in the Garden: Life Lessons through Prison Horticulture* (Oakland, CA: New Village, 2006); and Smoyer, "Good and Healthy."

115. See Otsuki, "Sustainable Partnerships" and Wisconsin Farm to School, "Wausau: Thomas Jefferson Elementary School Garden," June 2015, accessed 5 October 2017, <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/f2successjefinal060415-web.pdf>.

tions. The pantry also verifies little client information and thus avoids many of the burdensome regulations about which many clients of typical network pantries complain. For example, clients do not need to show their driver's licenses when they arrive at the door. These operating procedures, including accessible hours of operation, use of hand written record-keeping, and reduced requirements for services are the results of democratic deliberation, which takes place in an equitable and inclusive engagement space.

The pantry has forged relationships with many of the grocery stores in the surrounding areas, which has enabled it to gain a reputation as always bringing out something better when something runs out; the clients there do not need to wait in line for fear that the "good stuff" will run out, this pantry *always* seems to have "good stuff."

While the pantry is volunteer run, it is simultaneously client run: many of the pantry clients work tirelessly to run the pantry operations. This merging of patron and client creates an environment where radical hospitality is second nature and is a result of invitation, listening, and embracing the gifts of diversity. Likewise, the immigrant community roots of this pantry and the alternative route that it takes in its operations exemplify what it means for a community to understand the role of race, power, and injustice.

In summary, institutional food sourcing decisions take place in several public contexts—among them, public K-12 schools, public universities, public prisons, and hunger-relief agencies—and implicate numerous values, including animal welfare, cost, accessibility, convenience, cultural appropriateness, social acceptability, healthfulness, freshness, quality, workers' rights, localness, and environmental sustainability. Sometimes, these contexts amount to democratic associations or are situated within a broader democratic context that makes democratic norms and principles operative. More generally, by implementing policies and procedures that make institutional procurement decisions more fully comply with democratic norms, the decisions can benefit in terms of legitimacy, respectfulness, and epistemic soundness. The literature on deliberative democracy articulates numerous instrumental and intrinsic reasons in favor of many forms of civic engagement, ranging from simple majoritarian voting to robust, authoritative public deliberation that meets ideals of public reasoning among free and equal citizens. Decision-makers should consider the full range of values that previous deliberators have countenanced and that might be identified by relevant stakeholder groups, even if communities must collectively agree to prioritize some values over others, and even though some communities may legitimately deem some values irrelevant to their collective decisions. Introducing more democratic procedures, and strengthening existing ones, can help to identify value conflicts, reduce the extent of those conflicts, and find a path to their appropriate resolution. Likewise, practicing principled civic engagement, like that described by the Kirwan Institute, can create more equitable and inclusive spaces for democratic deliberation to take place. Prioritizing these issues in institutional food procurement decisions can better realize the intrinsic and instrumental benefits of collective reasoning through principled civic engagement with the stakeholders that food providers serve.<sup>116</sup>

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# An Expanded Understanding of the Ethical Importance of Civic Engagement in Food Sourcing Decisions at the Institutional Level

A Public Holistic Response

Daniel J. Brunson

Streiffer et al. make an important contribution to an issue of vital concern: institutional food sourcing. They argue that a variety of institutional food procurers/providers and recipients (i.e. food pantries, public schools, etc.), as well as a variety of values embedded in these decisions (e.g., autonomy, health, etc.) make this area of public life a key site for further civic engagement and democratic deliberation. That is, incorporating more voices, especially from the populations served, can improve both the *instrumental* value of food distribution by making it more sensitive to local conditions and needs, and the *intrinsic* value thereof by making it better embody democratic norms and also serving to train marginalized populations in those norms.

However, in the interest of furthering dialogue on this topic, I want to raise an objection to the entire enterprise—not at all a fatal one, I think, but something to consider in order to make this proposal more practical. I agree, to borrow terms from Albert Hirschman, that increasing the *voice* of stakeholders is important, especially in circumstances where *exit* is difficult, as with food insecurity. However, there is a growing body of research on the impact of poverty on decision-making.<sup>1</sup> In short, poverty itself is a cause of poor decisions, as poverty-related concerns increase ‘cognitive load.’ A financially secure person does not need to keep an exact track of their bank balance and calculate the consequence of a purchase on every subsequent purchase. For them, the choice between organic food and some generic brand is often a matter of mere preference, not of eating well or making rent.

My concern is this: while I recognize the value of autonomy and civic engagement, asking or expecting impoverished and potentially malnourished populations to participate in food sourcing decisions seems like an additional cognitive burden. This is especially so as these populations already tend to have to negotiate other forms of public assistance. Streiffer et al. do acknowledge “convenience” as a value at issue with food procurement, but convenience might literally make other decisions possible. Or, consider “welfare-to-work” programs that make job-training classes an eligibility requirement. Do we want to make people who are already struggling take nutrition classes in order to have access to food?

As the saying goes, “the perfect is the enemy of the good.” Accordingly, I am not claiming that deliberative democratic reforms in food sourcing are desirable only if the whole of society is restructured. I am also not advocating for some technocratic paternalism that takes food sourcing decisions away from people “for their own good.” Nonetheless, in light of a paper that argues powerfully for the benefits of greater civic engagement we should not fail to consider the potential costs.

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1. See Anandi Mani et al., “Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function,” *Science* 341, no. 6149 (2013): 976-80.



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# An Expanded Understanding of the Ethical Importance of Civic Engagement in Food Sourcing Decisions at the Institutional Level

A Public Holistic Response

Rich Hagopian

The authors have created a concise, clear argument for the urgent need of non-profit, food-providing institutions to engage in dialogue with their clients about their food procurement decisions. To do so prevents a number of shortcomings in the current model of institutional food distribution, which the authors highlight.

They suggest solutions that are both deeply warranted and practical, the impact of which will result in healthier populations and potential disruptions to the systems that position individuals for ill-health and food-insecurity.

The compelling insight articulated in the authors' discussion of food-related values opens a reader up to the deep societal implications at stake in how and why food is procured and disbursed by institutions. The positive effects of procuring institutional food in line with democratic values is clearly articulated and very timely considering that the question of what makes for a "good society" is in continual public discourse.

Drawing from diverse areas of research, the authors make a strong argument that orienting the decisions food-providing institutions make toward democratic values and practices creates "health" all around: for the institution, the individual, and the family receiving the food and for our society in which these agents live, act, and ultimately—through their subsequent decisions and actions—build. The potential scope of positive impact that could follow from this paper's conclusions linger in a reader's imagination; the costs associated with ignoring the human and societal benefits that come from principle-driven, democratic practices, and thus their incorporation into institutional food disbursement models, are equally powerful, though far more worrisome.

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