

# Building Sustainable and Ethical Food Futures through Economic Diversity: Options for a Mid-Sized City

Jenny Cameron and Rhyall Gordon

Please cite as

Cameron, J., & Gordon, R. (2010) 'Building sustainable and ethical food futures through economic diversity: Options for a mid-sized city'. Paper Presented at the Policy Workshop on The Future of Australia's Mid-Sized Cities. Latrobe University, Bendigo, VIC, 28 & 29 Sept.

## Abstract

This paper examines different types of initiatives that are available to mid-sized cities to build more sustainable and ethical food futures. The paper features initiatives that are being used in Newcastle, Australia, including community gardens and community supported agriculture. The paper uses the Diverse Economies Framework to highlight how these initiatives draw on different forms of labour (paid and unpaid) and different types transactions (market and non-market), and in so doing contribute to ethical economies in which interdependencies between people and the environment are centre-stage. The paper concludes by considering how policy and research might contribute to strengthening these types of ethical economic practices.

# Building Sustainable and Ethical Food Futures through Economic Diversity: Options for a Mid-Sized City

Jenny Cameron and Rhyall Gordon

## Introduction

At the time of writing, the 2010 federal election campaign was in full swing and for both major parties the issue of food was on the political agenda (and not just because the televised leaders' debate had to be "bumped" because it conflicted with the final of *Masterchef*). On Tuesday 3 August 2010, the ALP announced that in government they would develop a National Food Plan to address concerns about food security, quality, affordability and sustainability (Burke, 2010), while the Liberal Party had already announced that they would appoint a Food Security Minister at Cabinet level (Radio Australia, 2010). While the issue of food (rather than the more usual topic of agriculture) is only just making political headlines, for many years, producers and consumers, activists and campaigners in different parts of Australia have been developing ways of producing, distributing and consuming food to respond to concerns about the environmental, economic and social impacts of the current food "system". In this paper we discuss some of the different food initiatives that have been developed in one mid-sized city in Australia, and we canvas policies that would help support these initiatives and contribute to more sustainable and ethical economies.

We start by locating these initiatives, and related policy supports, in two contexts: the first, the context of contemporary concerns about food; and the second, the more theoretical context of how to understand and represent these initiatives. We argue that the initiatives can be understood as contributing to a diverse and resilient food economy that is comprised of an array of economic practices (including paid, unpaid and alternatively paid labour; market, non-market and alternative market transactions; and capitalist, non-capitalist and alternative capitalist enterprises). We also highlight how this diverse and resilient food economy can incorporate an ethical dimension which acknowledges and builds interconnections between people within a local area—and further afield—and between people and the environment.

## Food Matters

Food is at the nexus of so many contemporary concerns about what the future holds. Even if the most extreme climate change and peak oil scenarios are not realised, there is no doubt that we have to change our activities around food—we have to farm in more sustainable ways to protect soils, water quality and biodiversity; fish within the limits of the oceans' supplies; support methods of food production and distribution that will serve the wellbeing of small-scale farmers and the poorest in the global south; develop food distribution systems in the global north that get food from the paddock to the plate in ways that minimise environmental harm while maximising affordability; and consume in

ways that might redress the global polarisation between what Raj Patel (2009) graphically characterises as the 1 billion of us who are stuffed and the 800 million who are starved. Along with the human-centred focus of so much of our food activity, we also have to produce and consume in ways that respects the dignity of non-human others.

Across the globe, people in a range of contexts are working on initiatives to address these issues and build more viable, sustainable and equitable food futures. These initiatives range from globally connected movements such as La Via Campesina and Meatless Monday,<sup>i</sup> to national level organisations such as MASIPAG in the Philippines the Landless Settlers Movement (MST) in Brazil,<sup>ii</sup> to the multitude of smaller place-based initiatives that can be found in rural and urban areas across the globe—and that are largely the focus of this paper. These initiatives include neighbourhood-based production in backyards and community gardens, direct sourcing from farmers (through farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture or food-cooperatives), fair trade networks and non-profit endeavours specifically concerned with food for the marginalised and disadvantaged.

This range of food initiatives, from global movements to place-based projects, has captured the imagination of many. But one issue is how to represent these initiatives and how to position them in relation to the prevailing ways that food is produced, distributed and consumed. Most often commentators identify a mainstream food system and characterise it as a capitalist system which is essentially controlled by multinational corporations who globally coordinate food production and distribution with little regard for environmental and social concerns, and with support from supranational institutions (primarily the WTO and World Bank), and, to a lesser extent, national governments. The sorts of initiatives that largely feature in this paper—community gardens, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, food cooperatives and so on—are then usually positioned as alternatives to this dominant capitalist system. Sometimes these alternatives are described as 'embedded within' the mainstream (Campbell, 2004, p. 346); sometimes, as opposing and resisting the mainstream (see Allen et al., 2003). In either case, initiatives are positioned in relation to a perceived dominant food system (in the same 'capitalocentric' way that alternative economic projects more generally are positioned in relation to a perceived mainstream capitalist economy [Gibson-Graham, 2006a; see also Healy 2009]).

The characterisation of food initiatives such as community gardens, community supported agriculture and so on as alternative inevitably gets bound up in a binary opposition between the mainstream and alternative—with some troubling implications. Alternative food initiatives are often framed only in positive terms; while the conventional system is ascribed negative values. However, Watts et al (2005, p. 34) point out that alternative initiatives are not necessarily more environmentally or socially beneficial than conventional approaches;<sup>iii</sup> and Morgan et al (2008, p. 189) remind us that sometimes work on alternatives 'comes close to celebrating alternativeness as an end in itself, when it was always meant to be a means to more substantive ends—namely, the creation of socially just, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable food chains'.<sup>iv</sup>

When food initiatives are positioned as alternatives in relation to a dominant and overarching system, they are also framed as vulnerable and able to be coopted into the mainstream. For example, Watts et al. (2005) distinguish between weak alternatives that have been incorporated into the mainstream food system, and strong alternatives that are

less easily integrated. In this schema, organic food and increasingly fair trade are portrayed as weak alternatives, and therefore somehow deficient, because they are now commonplace on the shelves of major supermarkets. Whereas networks such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture that directly link producers and consumers and minimise the number of intermediaries along the food supply chain are given as examples of strong alternatives (Watt et al. 2005). One problem with this framing is that the degree of separation from the mainstream becomes the critical defining feature, and initiatives that are closer to the mainstream are seen as having been weakened, and their alternativeness and integrity diminished. As a result other ways of characterising these initiatives are lost from view. Using the example of fair trade, Healy (2009) points out that instead of being portrayed as having been coopted into the mainstream, the 'expanding presence [of fair trade] in the global marketplace ... could just have easily be represented as a powerful innovation that has injected an ethical sensibility into trade that did not exist 20 years ago' (p. 341).

The mainstream-alternative framing is also problematic because of how the alternative is aligned with the local and small-scale—and therefore positioned as ineffective in the face of the global scale of a dominant capitalist food system. This framing inevitably relies on a realist stance so even global phenomena like fair trade or Meatless Monday or La Via Campesina are easily dismissed as being too small-scale, fragmented and localised when pitted against the volume and value of food that is traded in the mainstream system, particularly through global corporations (see also Healy, 2009, p. 341). As a result, the binary opposition between the dominant and alternative tends to present food initiatives as ineffective and powerless, and in so doing undermines these attempts to produce, distribute and consume food in ways that might address economic, social and environmental injustices (see also Hill, 2008).

Not only is the mainstream-alternative binary conceptually problematic, it is hard to sustain in practice. For example, some producers take a hybrid approach and supply both alternative and conventional systems (Watts et al., p. 36). Likewise, many consumers also take a hybrid approach and for practical and ethical reasons source produce from both alternative and conventional systems (Kneafsey et al., 2008). Indeed, Morgan et al. (2008, p. 166) argue that the borders between conventional and alternative food systems 'are more porous and much less static than ... the literature sometimes implies'.

Given the conceptual and practical problems with the conventional-alternative framing, how then do we understand the various ways that food is produced, distributed and consumed, and the plethora of global, national and place-based initiatives? This is not an abstract and academic concern. As we will go on to demonstrate in this paper, how we represent food-based activities has practical implications for the types of policies and practices that become feasible—and the types of food futures that we might build.

In this paper, we draw on the Diverse Economies Framework (see Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003; Community Economies Collective, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2006b) to represent the food landscape as comprised of a diversity of enterprises, markets and labour practices. We argue that the Diverse Economies Framework opens up the food economy to an interpretation that overcomes the limitations of the mainstream-alternative binary. The diverse economies framing unpacks "the mainstream" thereby diminishing its apparent dominance, while simultaneously allowing other approaches to food to populate.

We argue that this reconceptualisation of the “foodscape” opens up new opportunities for policies that might contribute to building more sustainable and ethical food futures. In the next section we apply the Diverse Economies Framework to the food economy of one mid-sized Australian city to illustrate how we might think differently about food activities and initiatives, and then in the final section we explore the policy opportunities that arise from this framing, particularly in the context of mid-sized cities.<sup>v</sup>

## Food Diversity in Newcastle, Australia

The diverse food economy of Newcastle, Australia is presented in Table 1. Here we find a diversity of enterprises producing and distributing food; various avenues through which food is transacted between producers and consumers, and a variety of ways of compensating workers who produce and distribute food. This is by no means the complete food landscape of Newcastle; rather, we use the table to illustrate some of the key features of rethinking the food economy—and policy options—through the Diverse Economies Framework.

There are several important features of the diverse food economy in Table 1. This first is that the rows do not necessarily line up. For example, although there are capitalist enterprises in the form of nationally and internationally based retailers (such as Coles, Woolworths, IGA, Franklins and ALDI) that transact produce through the market and employ waged workers (all in the top row of the table), these enterprises can also be active in other parts of the diverse food economy. For example, ALDI participates in non-market transactions by donating excess food to OzHarvest Food Rescue, a charitable organisation which has recently started operating in Newcastle to collect excess food and pass it on to welfare groups (Jack, 2010, p. 1). The major retailers all sell fair trade produce (chiefly chocolate, coffee and tea) and thereby participate in an alternative market that provides a fairer income for small farmers in the majority (or “developing”) world.

Conversely, there are non-capitalist enterprises that operate in various parts of the diverse food economy. For example, The Beanstalk Organic Food is a non-capitalist enterprise that operates as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative. This means it participates in an alternative market whereby food is sourced directly from nearby farmers, with farmers setting the price for the produce they sell to Beanstalk (for more on this see Cameron, 2010). Beanstalk employs one paid worker to coordinate many of its activities, but it also relies on workers who are paid in-kind with boxes of produce. Similarly, there are over ten community gardens in Newcastle (all non-capitalist enterprises) that operate in various parts of the diverse economy. Some employ paid workers, usually through grant funding, although one is looking at developing products for market sale in order to become self-funded. Some provide in-kind payments for workers (for example in one community garden people on the “chook” roster feed and water the chooks and clean the nesting boxes, and in return are paid in-kind with the eggs they collect on the day). Others are volunteer-based with people contributing labour with no expectation that there will be any payment for their work. Produce from the community gardens is transacted in a variety of ways. One community garden has vegetable and herb seedlings that it sells each Saturday morning on the grounds of Newcastle City Council’s

Community Greening Centre (where people come to collect free trees). Other community gardens are unfenced and run as collective projects where produce is available for anyone to take (including people who walk by or work through the gardens). Other community gardens are fenced and operate on an individual basis where produce in each garden bed is “owned” by the community gardener who tends the plot (for more on the variety of community gardens in Newcastle see Cameron et al., 2010).

**Table 1: The Diverse Food Landscape of Newcastle.**

ENTERPRISES	TRANSACTIONS	LABOUR
<p><b>Capitalist Enterprises</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nationally based retailers (Coles, Woolworth, IGA, Franklins)</li> <li>▪ International retailers (ALDI)</li> <li>▪ Local retailers (including restaurants and coffee shops)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Market Transactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food from major supermarkets</li> <li>▪ Food from local retailers</li> <li>▪ Produce from organic food outlets</li> <li>▪ Sales of community garden herbs to restaurants and coffee shops</li> </ul>	<p><b>Waged Labour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workers at national and international retailers</li> <li>▪ Workers at local retailers</li> <li>▪ Workers at organic food outlets</li> <li>▪ CSA worker</li> <li>▪ Community garden workers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alternative Capitalist Enterprises</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small family-run food businesses</li> <li>• Organic food outlets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Alternative Market Transactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food sourced directly from farmers (farmers’ markets, CSA, food coop)</li> <li>▪ Saturday morning sales of community garden seedlings</li> <li>▪ Fair trade produce</li> </ul>	<p><b>Alternatively Paid Labour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-kind payments for CSA workers</li> <li>▪ In-kind payments for community garden workers</li> <li>▪ Self-employed workers (e.g. farmers, sole operator food outlets)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Non-capitalist Enterprises</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-employed farm businesses</li> <li>▪ Self-employed food operators</li> <li>▪ CSA (The Beanstalk Organic Food)</li> <li>▪ Community gardens</li> <li>▪ University food cooperative</li> <li>▪ OzHarvest Food Rescue</li> </ul>	<p><b>Non-market Transactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food from backyard production and community gardens used for home use or gifted to neighbours and friends</li> <li>▪ Donations of excess food to OzHarvest Food Rescue</li> <li>▪ Donations of waste from restaurants and coffee shops for community garden composting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Unpaid Labour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Backyard food producers</li> <li>▪ Community garden volunteers</li> <li>▪ University food cooperative volunteers</li> </ul>

*Note: This table is not meant to be a complete inventory of the diverse food economy in Newcastle. It is intended to illustrate some of the diversity.*

In the diverse food economy there are also alternative capitalist enterprises and these take different forms. For example, there are small family-run food businesses that employ family members. These can operate in a similar way to capitalist enterprises with an owner employing waged workers; however, when employees are family members, the conditions of employment are likely to be governed by familial commitments and not necessarily the for-profit motive that drives other capitalist enterprises. There are also organic food outlets that operate in a similar way to capitalist enterprises, with owners employing waged workers; however, these enterprises primarily purchase produce from

local and organic producers (and sometimes the community garden that sells herbs). This means that the for-profit motive is moderated by an environmental commitment to sourcing particular types of produce (not necessarily the cheapest).

#### Implication I: From Two Economic Systems to Diverse Economic Activities

One implication of representing the food economy in this way is that the binary opposition between mainstream and alternative food “systems” is broken down. The food economy becomes visible as a variety of enterprises, transactions and ways of remunerating labour. The food economy is therefore populated with practices and activities that go well beyond a simple mainstream-alternative binary.<sup>vi</sup> Importantly, there is no necessary connection between the different enterprises and the types of transactions or forms of labour they use. Capitalist and alternative capitalist enterprises such as ALDI or local coffee shops, for example, participate in non-market transactions; conversely, non-capitalist enterprises, such as Beanstalk and some of the community gardens employ waged workers and engage in market transactions. This representation breaks down the idea of a capitalist economy or capitalist market or capitalist system. Capitalism is precisely defined as a form of enterprise in which non-producers (e.g. a proprietor or a board of directors) appropriate and distribute the surplus labour produced by paid labourers (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Capitalism is reduced ‘to a type of enterprise ... in a larger economic landscape, [and therefore] it is easier to see the other ways in which goods and services are produced and exchanged’ (Healy, 2009 p. 340, see also Gibson- Graham, 2006a & b).

#### Implication II: Diverse Activities *AND* Diverse Interconnections

The second implication that emerges from the diverse economies representation is that the food economy becomes visible as both diverse *and* interconnected. Many of these interconnections are local and local-regional. For example, one community garden sells fresh herbs to restaurants and coffee shops in Newcastle and usually at the same time as it drops off the herbs it picks up donated food scraps and coffee grounds that go into the compost that it uses to grow the herbs in. The CSA (The Beanstalk Organic Food) and the organic food shop are interconnected with local-regional farmers (primarily those who are growing organic produce). Through the weekly farmers’ market at the showground, local-regional farmers and producers are interconnected with consumers (either individual consumers or groups of consumers as in the case of the University food cooperative which sources its produce from the farmers’ markets). We could even say that the numerous householders who grow backyard produce are interconnected with retailers: householders purchase the seeds and other garden inputs that retailers stock.

Some of the interconnections, however, are with more distant people and places. There are regional-national connections between similar types of initiatives in different parts of the country. For example, OzHarvest Food Rescue has operations in Sydney, Melbourne and Wollongong, The Beanstalk Organic Food has connections with other CSAs in centres that include Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns. These connections build networks that support initiatives and expose them to new ideas and developments in their area of initiative. Through the fair trade produce that is available at major food retailers

and also local coffee shops there are also distant connections with people whose lives are very different from those in the minority (or “developed” world).

One characteristic of many of these interconnections, both local and further afield, is that they involve some form of ethical commitment. For example, the local donations of excess food to OzHarvest Food Rescue are based on an environmental concern for the amount of waste that occurs within the food industry and a social concern for people who do not have easy access to fresh and good quality food. Similarly, the connections between the community gardens and local restaurants and coffee shops, while based on a market transaction (fresh herb sales), also involve an environmental and social commitment on the part of restaurants and coffee shops to collect and store waste food scraps and coffee grounds to donate to the community gardens, organisations that are recognised as playing an important social role.

Regional interconnections between farmers and consumers are similarly based on an ethic of care. The Beanstalk Organic Food for example sources produce from organic farmers across the region and this connection goes beyond a simple self-interested transaction arrangement where there is a producer with a product to sell and a willing buyer. The whole aim of Community Supported Agriculture is to connect people in a transparent and direct way to make explicit the interdependencies between producers and consumers, rural and urban. This means that producers are still supported during hard times. So when one farmer suffered crop losses because of floods, Beanstalk continued to pay him what he would have received even though it meant that consumers still paid the same amount for fruit and vegetables boxes that may have had slightly less produce or less variety of produce in them (see Cameron, 2010)

Ethical concerns are also an element in the fair trade connections with distant people and places, whether these connections are through major retailers stocking fair trade chocolate from major food manufacturers (e.g. Cadbury’s fair trade dairy milk chocolate) or through smaller fair trade networks (such as Black Star coffee). In either case, both have fair trade certification that guarantees that social and ethical commitments are being acted on through mechanisms such as a guaranteed minimum price for small producers and an additional fair trade premium that the cooperatives of small farmers can use to build educational and health facilities and foster more ecologically sustainable agriculture practices.<sup>vii</sup>

The wider connections with people and places outside of the local and even regional area are important. Food localisation has been critiqued because it can promote a form of “defensive localism” based on conservatism, parochialism and nationalism (e.g. Winter, 2003, p. 23). It is therefore important that the diverse food economy includes practices such as fair trade that are based on an ethic of care and build connections with those in distant places who struggle to make a decent living even as they produce for global food markets.

### Implication III: From a Realist to Performative Stance

One criticism of the Diverse Economies Framework is that it doesn’t take into account the scale of the activities in the various cells in Table 1. The scale of activity of capitalist enterprises, for example, is presented as equivalent to the scale of activity of alternative capitalist or non-capitalist enterprises. Some researchers have responded to this criticism



by studying the scale of economic activities in various parts of the diverse economy. For example, Williams (2005) has carefully studied the extent to which commodification (i.e. goods and services transacted through the market) has become a feature of contemporary life in the UK. Contrary to the common belief that more and more we rely on the market, he has found that self-provisioning and mutual aid (i.e. non-market and alternative market transactions) are so widely practiced that people spend the same amount of time doing paid work as they do unpaid or alternatively paid work, and that the proportion of time spent in this form of work has increased relative to the amount of time spent in paid work.<sup>viii</sup>

It is important to demonstrate just how much activity goes on outside those parts of the diverse economy that are presumed to be dominant (i.e. the top row of capitalist enterprises, market transactions and waged labour). However, a different response is to ask not which parts of the diverse economy are the biggest and growing, but which parts of the diverse economy are worth growing and strengthening. This question moves us away from debates and contestations about how the world is, to discussions about how the world might be and the sort of future we want to contribute to creating. In contemporary social science debates this is the known as the move from a realist stance to a performative stance (e.g. Cameron et al., 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy, 2009; Law, 2004; Law and Urry, 2004).

In this chapter, we are arguing for a food future that is comprised of diversity of economic activities. Just as ecologists have found time and again that ‘the more species that live together, the more stable and productive the ecosystems they compose’ (Wilson, 2003, p. 110), so too there are good reasons to think that a diverse food “system” will be stable, productive and resilient.<sup>ix</sup> Conversely, just as agronomists have found that monocropping results in fragile farmscapes that all too often collapse when conditions change, so too there are good reasons to think that a food “system” that is dominated by a handful of players and activities is vulnerable to a change in climate, whether economic, political, social or environmental. Thus we believe that sustainability, resilience and diversity go hand in hand.<sup>x</sup>

Along with diverse enterprises, transactions and forms of labour, we are also arguing for a diversity of interconnections between these activities. As we have discussed above, interconnections between different parts of the diverse economy can reflect an ethic of care for others and for the environment. Living in the Anthropocene—the name given by Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen (and now being seriously considered by the International Commission on Stratigraphy as the successor to the Holocene) to a new geological epoch that recognises the ways in which humans have totally transformed the planet—demands nothing less than this ethic of care for others and the environment (see also Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Gibson et al., 2010).

## Policy Options for Growing the Diverse Food Economy

What then are the policies that might contribute to building a sustainable and ethical food future that is comprised of a diversity of economic activities as well as a diversity of interconnections? And what options are there for mid-sized cities such as Newcastle?

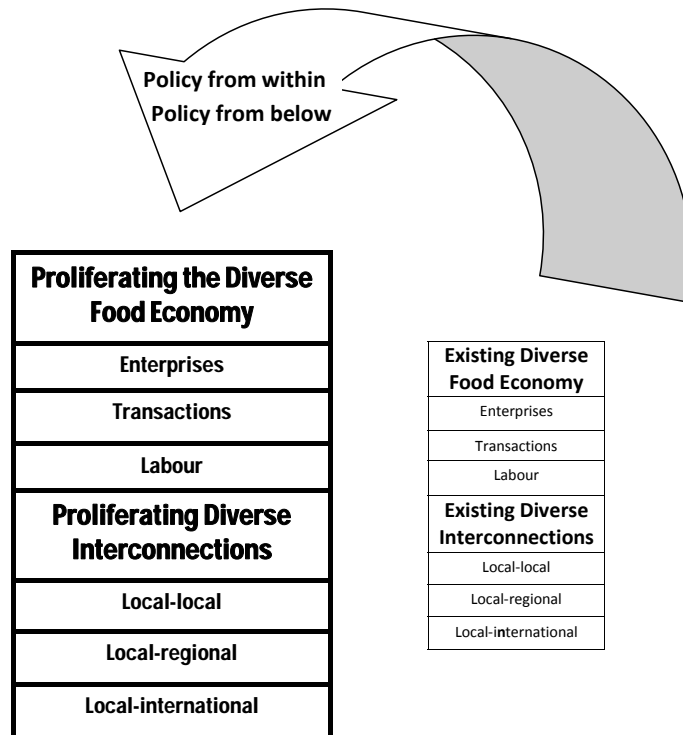
Our experience from living, working and researching in Newcastle is that mid-sized cities are well-positioned. Newcastle like many of Australia's mid-sized cities has a productive agricultural hinterland, and an active network of food activists and campaigners who are already building a remarkable array of food initiatives (and Table 1 gives an indication of some). This existing diversity provides an opportunity for policy to work in conjunction with existing initiatives to strengthen what is already happening. Thus we are advocating for a policy *from below* approach.<sup>xi</sup> A second and complementary policy approach is to work *from within*. This means that policy bodies (whether local, state or federal government, or NGOs or community groups, or businesses or corporations) look to their own behaviour and practices to ensure they are consistent with and contributing to a diverse food economy. Based on the discussion in the previous section, policies from below and policies from within can focus on both strategies to proliferate the existing diverse activities (in terms of diverse enterprises, transactions and labour) and strategies to proliferate diverse interconnections (in terms of local to local, local to regional, and local to international interconnections) (see Figure 1). In what follows we give examples of strategies from Figure 1. These examples are also only suggestions to demonstrate the sorts of possibilities that emerge by using the Diverse Economies Framework and by thinking along the axes of i) policies from below and from within, and ii) policies to proliferate diverse activities and diverse interconnections. We have developed examples primarily in relation to local government; however, the policies (particularly policies from within) can be adapted for state and federal government, and other bodies (e.g. non-government organisations, educational centres, businesses and corporations).

### Policies to Grow Diversity

In Newcastle there are policies that support existing initiatives and are contributing to diversity in the food economy. Newcastle City Council, for example, has a Community Greening Centre that is contributing to the current proliferation of community gardens in Newcastle. The Centre helps interested groups access land; provides insurance coverage, tools and advice; and assists with grant applications and management of finances. This frees up groups to focus on what they want to do—garden (rather than say having to run sausage sizzles to raise money for public liability insurance). Importantly, not just Council, but other government departments and groups have similar policies—in Newcastle, NSW Housing supports community gardens on its estates; and there are examples of churches, bowling clubs, Catchment Management Authorities, RSL clubs, neighbourhood associations and multicultural centres supporting interested groups develop community gardens on their land (see also Cameron et al., 2010). Newcastle City Council also provides small, but readily accessible Placemaking Grants that are ideal for community gardens to use for basic infrastructure and set-up. This type of support for groups interested in community gardens is relatively common in cities and town across Australia

(e.g. Thomas, 2008). Perhaps less familiar is support for growing other sorts of diversity in the food economy.

Figure 1: Growing the Diverse Food Economy.



The production of fruit and vegetables is ubiquitous in Australian back (and front) yards, and is an activity that has real potential to be supported. Strategies could include providing advice and running workshops on everything from design and layout, composting, companion planting, crop rotation, seed propagation; to garden animals such as bees and chooks; to water recycling and smart water use. There could be soil testing days where households get advice about building up their soils for different types of plant. Like mobile libraries and toy libraries, these types of services could be offered through mobile gardening vans that visit neighbourhoods. There could be mentoring schemes where neighbours mentor other neighbours who need support to start growing. Ghosh et al. (2009) have modelled the food production potential of different urban environments in Auckland, New Zealand. They found that households in low and medium density housing areas could grow sufficient vegetables year-round to meet their requirements. While we are not necessarily arguing for households to be self-sufficient (as we're interested in the ways diverse food practices can promote sustainability and resilience, and build ethical economies), their research certainly highlights the potential contribution of backyard production. Here it is important to particularly support low income households as research has shown that these households can easily grow thousands of dollars of produce

(Graham and Cornwall, 2009). There are also opportunities for backyard production to be income-generating. In Newcastle, the Beanstalk Organic Food has a table at their weekly pick-up location where members can sell excess backyard produce. The Newcastle Transition Towns group is looking to establish a stall at the weekly farmers' market where backyard producers could sell excess produce. On the Wai'anai Coast, native Hawaiian families who were involved in a backyard aquaculture project to grow tilapia formed co-operatives to sell their produce on the fish markets.

Outside of backyards there is considerable potential for policies that would support various approaches to urban agriculture. These include Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture, a model being developed in Boulder Colorado, where local farmers use the front and backyards of willing residents to produce food that is shared between both parties.<sup>xii</sup> Once farmers' and residents' needs have been met, surplus produce is sold through the farmers' market or given to other families in need. This initiative also has an apprenticeship program to train budding urban farmers to use their own or others' gardens for food production. There are also opportunities to transform public lands into urban agriculture hubs. There are opportunities for street planting of fruit trees, planting orchards in pocket parks, and planting of broad acre crops on large swathes of land along creeks and parks. Following the Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture model these "farmlands" could be leased to small-scale urban farmers, or turned over to support services and other agencies to use for educational and training programs in horticulture and related fields. For the more adventurous there are possibilities for public aquaculture projects.

Along with possibilities for policies from below to support existing diversity in the food economy, there are opportunities to develop policies from within. Many councils (including Newcastle City Council) are moving to waste collection systems that separate and remove organic waste. Councils can use this waste to produce its own compost that could be donated to fledgling community gardens, sold at farmers' markets or used to remunerate the many volunteers that contribute to council activities. The organic waste could also be used to develop large scale worm farms and produce the rich vermiculture that is the icing on all urban agriculture cakes. There are also smaller-scale opportunities for staff employed in government and the private and community sectors to run their own small-scale on-site composting systems and worm farms, with compost and vermiculture being taken home for backyard production, donated to other food initiatives (like community gardens), or bagged and sold to raise money for favourite charities.

By using policies from below and policies from within to build on and strengthen the existing food initiatives in a mid-sized city like Newcastle, the diversity of the food economy is strengthened—as are food resilience and sustainability. Opportunities emerge for existing and new enterprises (including capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises); for a variety of transactions (including market and non-market transactions); and for various forms of labour (including paid and unpaid).

### Policies to Grow Diverse Interconnections

There are policies *from below* that can be used to grow interconnections between the activities in the diverse food economy. Local to local interconnections can be fostered by programs that link different entities in the diverse food economy. For example,

restaurants and coffee shops can be linked to community gardens that are willing to take coffee grounds, and fruit and vegetable scraps for composting (an initiative that one business sustainability officer in Newcastle is currently working on).

There are local to regional interconnections that can be fostered. For example, local councils can foster connections between urban consumers and rural producers through supporting Community Supported Agriculture initiatives, farmers' markets or food cooperatives with access to facilities, financial advice and even transport supports.

There are exciting and largely untapped possibilities for developing policy *from within* to build and strengthen a variety of interconnections. Local to local interconnections could, for example, be built by drawing on the idea of alternative currencies<sup>xiii</sup> and community chests,<sup>xiv</sup> with staff in government departments and other workplaces in the main city area electing to receive a small part of their pay in the form of a local currency or token that could be spent on lunches and morning and afternoon teas in a network of alternative and capitalist enterprises (such as local cafes, bakeries, fruit and vegetable shops) and non-capitalist enterprises (such as social service-run training cafes for marginalised groups). In turn these enterprises could use the local currency or tokens to trade with each other or even pay for council rates and other services.

Local to regional, and local to international interconnections could be fostered through initiatives such as Fairtrade Towns.<sup>xv</sup> The town of Garstang in Lancashire, Northern England is an excellent example of a town that addressed both local to regional and local to international connections. The town set out to become the world's first Fairtrade Town, by meeting five criteria set by the Fairtrade Foundation. These criteria encourage a policy change from within as one of the criteria is for local councils and other workplaces to serve fair trade produce wherever possible. Garstang became the world's first Fairtrade Town in 2000 but it gained support for the fair trade initiative because it also worked with local-regional producers to simultaneously promote produce closer to home. As Morgan et al. identify 'the [fair trade] campaign to highlight the plight of primary producers abroad resonated with the campaign to help primary producers at home' (2008, p. 174-6).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that there is considerable potential to develop policies from below and policies from within to build on the existing diversity that already exists in the food economy of a mid-sized city like Newcastle. As academic researchers we are particularly interested in the role that research can play. There are opportunities for researchers to work alongside food campaigners and activists, and policy makers to identify and map the diversity that already exists; to investigate innovations that are being developed in other urban areas in the minority and majority worlds, to help devise and pilot strategies for specific local contexts; and to help build interconnections with communities in other places who are also building sustainable and ethical food futures.

## References

- Allen, P., FitzSimmons, M., Goodman, M., and Warner, K. (2003). Shifting plates in the agrifood landscape: The tectonics of alternative agrifood initiatives in California. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19 (1): 61-75.
- Burke, T. (2010). *Australia's first ever National Food Plan - Our Food, Our Future*, Australian Labor Party. Retrieved 9 August, 2010, from <http://www.alp.org.au/federal-government/news/australia-s-first-ever-national-food-plan---our-fo/>
- Cameron, J. (2010, forthcoming). Business as usual or economic innovation?: Work, markets and growth in community and social enterprises. *Third Sector Review*. Special Issue on Social Enterprise and Social Innovation, 16 (2).
- Cameron, J., and Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2003). Feminising the economy: Metaphors, strategies, politics. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10 (2): 145-57.
- Cameron, J., Manhood, C., and Pomfrett, J. (2010, forthcoming), *Growing the community of community gardens: Research contributions*, Refereed paper presented at the Community Garden Conference, University of Canberra, October.
- Campbell, M.C. (2004) Building a common table: The role for planning in community food systems. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23: 341-55.
- Community Economies Collective. (2001). Imagining and enacting non-capitalist futures. *Socialist Review* 28 (3/4): 93-135.
- Ghosh, S., Vale, R., and Vale, B. (2008). Local food production in home gardens: Measuring on-site sustainability potential of residential development. *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development* 7 (4): 430-51.
- Gibson, K., Fincher, R., and Rose, D.B. (2010) Reports from workshops: An ethics for living the Anthropocene. *Dialogue* 29 (2): 81-5.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006a). *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006b). *A postcapitalist politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2008). Diverse economies: Performative practices for 'other worlds'. *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (5): 613-632.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K., and Roelvink, G. (2009). An economic ethics for the Anthropocene. *Antipode* 41 (1): 320-46.
- Goodman, M.K. (2010). The mirror of consumption: Celebrityization, developmental consumption and the shifting cultural politics of fair trade. *Geoforum* 41: 104-16.
- Graham, J., and Cornwall, J. (2009). Building community economies in Massachusetts: An emerging model of economic development?. In Amin, A. (ed.) *The Social Economy: International Perspectives on Economic Solidarity*, London: Zed.
- Healy, S. (2009). Economies, alternative. In Kitchin, R. and Thrift, N. (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Volume 3, pp. 338-34. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hill, A. (2008). Action research tools for growing community food economies in Mindanao, The Philippines. Paper presented at Agri-food Conference, The University of Sydney, November.
- Jack, V. (2010). Excess becomes meals. *The Star*, June 30: 1.
- Kneafsey, M., Cox, R., Holloway, L., Venn, L. and Tuomainen, H. (2008). *Reconnecting consumers, producers and food: Exploring alternatives*. Oxford: Berg.
- Law, J. (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*. London: Routledge.
- Law, J., and Urry, J. (2004). Enacting the social. *Economy and Society*, 33 (3): 390 - 410.
- Le Mare, A. (2008). The impact of fair trade on social and economic development: A review of the literature. *Geography Compass* 2 (6): 1922-42.
- Morgan, K., Marsden, T. and Murdoch, J. (2008). *Worlds of food: Place, power and provenance in the food chain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Patel, R. (2009). *Stuffed and starved: Markets, power and the hidden battle for the world food system*. Melbourne: Black Inc.

- Radio Australia. (2010). *Australian election campaign hungry for food security*, presented by Linda Mottram, 3 August 2010. Retrieved 9 August, 2010, from, <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/asiapac/stories/201008/s2972573.htm>
- Resnick, S., and Wolff, R. (1987). *Knowledge and class: A marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Robinson, J. (2006). *Ordinary cities: Between modernity and development*. London: Routledge.
- Rose, D.B. (2004). *Reports from a wild country: Ethics for decolonisation*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Saunders, C., Baber, A., and Taylor G. (2006). *Food Miles – Comparative Energy/Emissions Performance of New Zealand's Agriculture Industry*. Research Report No. 285, Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit (AERU), Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand, Retrieved August 3, 2010, from [http://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/dspace/bitstream/10182/125/1/aeru\\_rr\\_285.pdf](http://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/dspace/bitstream/10182/125/1/aeru_rr_285.pdf)
- Thomas, F. (2008). *Getting started in community gardening*. Sydney: City of Sydney.
- Watts, D.C.H, Ilbery, B. and Maye, D. (2005). Making reconnections in agro-food geography: Alternative systems of food provision. *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (1): 22-40.
- Wekerle, G. (2004). Food justice movements: Policy, planning and networks. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23: 378-86.
- Williams, C.C. (2005). *A commodified world? : Mapping the limits of capitalism*. London: Zed Books.
- Wilson, E.O. (2003). *Future of life*. Westminster, MD: Knopf Publishing Group.
- Winter, M. (2003). Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19 (1): 23-32.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> La Via Campesina is comprised of 148 organisations from 69 countries and representing an estimated 150 million small scale farmers, peasants and others. It promotes sustainable agriculture and the preservation of land, water, seeds and other natural resources. La Via Campesina has been at the forefront of getting food sovereignty, as opposed to food security, onto the global agenda. Meatless Monday is a non-profit initiative of The Monday Campaigns that was developed in association with the Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health. Originally a public health initiative to cut meat consumption in the US by 15%, Meatless Monday has become an international movement concerned not just with public health but with environmental impacts of current meat production methods.

<sup>ii</sup> MASIPAG is a farmer-led organisation in the Philippines that promotes sustainable agriculture and livelihoods of poor farmers. It is based on farmer-to-farmer education and support groups, and there are currently over 35,000 farmer-members. MST, or the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, reclaims land for poor landless workers and displaced peasant farmers. It started in 1984 and has 1 million members and has reclaimed over 5 million hectares of land. It has its own schools and health centres.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, local produce is assumed to be more environmentally friendly than imported produce because of the amount of "food miles" that imported produce travels. Yet a study of food miles found that locally-produced UK lamb had four times more energy embodied in it (and therefore more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) than imported New Zealand lamb (even accounting for the transportation from NZ to the UK) (Saunders et al., 2006).

<sup>iv</sup> Although Goodman (2010) raised some interesting concerns about use of celebrities to promote fair trade in the UK.

<sup>v</sup> Ann Hill is conducting a similar reframing of the economic and political dimensions of community food projects in Australia and The Philippines through her doctoral research project at ANU entitled 'Growing community food economies for a 21st century world' (see also Hill, 2008).

<sup>vi</sup> Kneafsey et al. (2008) are also interested in breaking down the conventional/alternative binary, but they use other axes of differentiation including the identities, motives and practices of producers and consumers, particularly as they relate to relations of care.

<sup>vii</sup> Le Mare (2008) has reviewed empirical research on fair trade and concludes that fair trade 'makes a significant contribution to development' (p. 1938).

<sup>viii</sup> Drawing on Williams, Healy (2009, 342) argues that our attention is so firmly fixed on the presumed dominance of "capitalism" that we cannot see the everyday economic activities that are all around us and sustaining us. In the same way, ecologist Edward Wilson urges us to turn our attention to the microscopic world. 'When we scan a lake', he says, 'our macroscopic eye sees only the relatively big organisms ... things big enough to splash and go bump in the night' and we miss the microscopic organisms that exist 'in vastly greater numbers and variety ... [the] 'seething myriads [that] are the foundation of the lake ecosystem and the hidden agents of its stability' (Wilson, 2003, p. 109).

<sup>ix</sup> Rose (2004) also draws from ecological systems to explore diversity and resilience in the human realm.

<sup>x</sup> Robinson (2006, Chp. 6) likewise argues that diverse economic activities are linked to sustainability and resilience.

<sup>xi</sup> In a similar vein, Wekerle (2004, p. 379) proposes a 'citizen-initiated policy making' approach to food initiatives; and Morgan et al. (2008) highlight how the "Tuscan model" of specialised local produce 'emerges from below ... [and] cannot be imposed "from above"' (p. 107).

<sup>xii</sup> See <http://www.communityrootsboulder.com/>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Across the globe there are thousands of examples of local currencies that are used to help build and sustain local economies. In the Berkshire area of Western Massachusetts there are 2 million Berkshares circulating, and they are accepted in over 350 local businesses and by five banks in the area (see <http://www.berkshares.org/index.htm>).

<sup>xiv</sup> Community chests are a form of workplace giving, where staff elect to donate a small portion of their pay to locally run organisations and charities (see for example <http://www.ccchest.org.au/>).

<sup>xv</sup> There are currently over 800 Fairtrade Towns, mainly in Europe and North America (see [www.fairtradetowns.org/](http://www.fairtradetowns.org/)).