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A GRASSROOTS REVOLUTION? IMAGINING CHANGE IN ST. LOUIS FOOD LANDSCAPES

Joselyn Walsh

Mentor: Peter Benson

This work engages with the formation of a burgeoning alternative food movement in St. Louis, MO by examining the conditions under which it arises as a response to dissatisfaction with conventional food. Through situating ethnographic interviews with St. Louis residents into a broader context of the problematization of U.S. food and eating outlined by Julie Guthman in *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism* and Susan Greenhalgh in *Fat-Talk Nation*, I discuss how people come to internalize dominant cultural narratives of food system problematization as their own. I draw on arguments from Guthman and Greenhalgh as well as from my own research with individuals and organizations in St. Louis to discuss points where the explanatory power of dominant cultural narratives of personal responsibility for health and nutrition and a focus on the consumer as a locus of intervention fall short. I provide evidence that the strength of these flawed narratives is pervasive enough to change the agendas of local organizations which would typically challenge the environmental and health effects of industrial agriculture to ones which seek to promote health and sustainability without challenging powerful economic interests. I argue that we need to be attentive of the power of reproducing these narratives, as a move to emphasize these types of initiatives may result in managing rather than addressing harm caused by powerful industries.