together at the table
Sustainability and Sustenance in the American Agrifood System
with luminaries such as Bill Friedland, David Goodman, Melanie DuPuis, and Julie Guthman.

Carol Shennan, Director of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, provided precious material and structural support. Without her help, this book would still be in a pile on my desk.

Many people helped with the research on this book and my other projects. At different times Richard Rawles, Jan Perez, Hilary McEwen, Valerie Kulert, Marty Kovach, Phil Howard, Mike Goodman, Dave Carlson, and Martha Brown provided invaluable assistance.

I am indebted to Peter Potter and Leif Jensen at Penn State University Press for their professionalism and forbearance. Andrew Lewis, my copyeditor, is one of those rare individuals who can see both the forest and the tiniest details of the trees as well as their undergrowth.

One theme that comes up again and again in the research of the history of social movements is the crucial importance of key individuals. This was clearly the case in the development of alternative agrifood movements and the programs I discuss in this book. These are the people who have the vision and the leadership to engage people to build a better world. While the leaders in these movements are recognized, there are also countless others in less visible positions who enable the progress of social movements. I would like to acknowledge them, although I don’t know them by name. You know who you are.

Everywhere you look these days there are signs that people are beginning to take charge of their food system. In a cafeteria in Los Angeles, children make their lunchtime choices at fresh-fruit and salad bars stocked with local produce. In a community garden in New York, low-income residents are producing organically grown fruits and vegetables for their own use and for sale. In Madison, Wisconsin, shoppers make their selections from a bounty of choices at a vibrant farmers’ market. In universities across the country, faculty members research and students study organic farming. In San Francisco, “at-risk” teenagers run an organic food business. On a farm in Santa Cruz, California, unionized farmworkers grow and harvest organic strawberries. In Washington, D.C., legislators develop new policies and programs to promote sustainable agriculture and community food security.

These kinds of activities span the entire United States, from Hawaii to Maine, as diverse groups of people work to construct alternatives to the conventional practices, discourses, and institutions of the contemporary agrifood system. In the United States much of this work has been spearheaded and encompassed by the movements for sustainable agriculture and community food security. The goals of these movements are to reconstruct the agrifood system to become more environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially just.

Alternative agrifood activities and actions are the result of both increased knowledge about the agrifood system and increased understanding that the system can be changed. Today’s newspapers and newsrooms, the oracles of
modern times, increasingly lead with stories about food and agriculture. Occurrences of mad cow disease, the mysterious infiltration of the food supply by genetically modified foods, pesticide drift near elementary schools, charity food distribution for working people, the transformation of farms into shopping centers, epidemic rates of obesity—all are regularly placed at the forefront of public consciousness. Every day in the United States resources are depleted, toxins enter the food chain, people go hungry, and the gap between the rich and the poor grows at an accelerating rate. Yet many people do not feel helpless in the face of this staggering array of environmental and social problems. They realize that, as the country moves further and further from democratic practice, these conditions have been accompanied and enabled by a process that wrests decision making away from ordinary people. They witness the failure of electoral politics and political parties to solve agrifood problems, a situation they fear can only get worse, as the decision-making ability of elected governments is superseded by the power of global capital to limit choice. They have decided that it is time to take matters into their own hands.

In many places and in many different ways people are struggling to improve conditions in the agrifood system. Not content to let food production, distribution, and quality be defined and determined by faceless others, they have taken action. Consciously or not, they are part of a new assemblage of movements sweeping the nation, movements for alternative food and agriculture. The issues with which these groups are concerned include food safety, access to food, environmental degradation, and rural development. Together they are addressing these basic issues of sustenance and sustainability—to reconfigure the agrifood system to meet people’s food needs both for the present and for the future.

Two movements figure prominently in these efforts: a movement for sustainable agriculture and a movement for community food security. The concerns they address are closely related but have somewhat different emphases. The sustainable agriculture movement has focused primarily on production-centered issues, such as environmental degradation and the viability of the family farm. The community food security movement has centered more on issues of distribution and consumption, such as food access and nutrition problems. These movements are related in different but complementary ways, and the increasing consumer demand for pesticide-free, organic, non-genetically modified food has only strengthened the ties between them. Because the issues they address are so important, they have attracted a broad range of participants and have become significant social movements.

Social movements are efforts to change widespread existing conditions—political, economic, and cultural. The multiple strategies that social movements employ to achieve their objectives can be quite varied. Alternative agrifood movements in the United States operate primarily at two levels: at the level of developing alternative practices, such as those just described, and at the level of changing institutions. Historically, many social movements have chosen to operate outside the state, having little faith in the sociopolitical process and power structures that excluded their concerns in the first place. In America’s agrifood system, for example, those who have been able to influence political decision making have been primarily producer groups and food industries little interested in issues of agricultural sustainability or food security. Yet because of the central role of government in the American agrifood system, the movements for sustainable agriculture and community food security have had to engage public institutions at local, state, and federal levels. Therefore, in addition to working on many other fronts, these alliances of farmers, environmentalists, consumers, and scientists have sought and achieved a “place at the table” in major food and agricultural institutions. Ideas that were once anathema, in the case of sustainable agriculture, or unknown, in the case of community food security, have become part of the policy, research, and education agendas of these institutions.

What is the effect of these efforts to create change in the agrifood system at both community and institutional levels? Although there has been no comprehensive evaluation of these efforts, it would seem that they have already begun to improve conditions of everyday life for those who have not been well served by the conventional agrifood system. For example, the creation of a farmers’ market in an inner city where there was previously little or no access to fresh fruit and vegetables is surely a positive development. Similarly, providing institutional funding to teams of researchers working with farmers to develop environmentally sound farming practices is an important step toward resource conservation in agriculture. These incremental improvements, significant in themselves, also provide openings for catalyzing further changes as programs and networks expand. The people involved in these diverse efforts can coalesce into a powerful social movement for restructuring and transforming the agrifood system in the direction of greater environmental soundness and social justice.

Alternative agrifood movements may also possess significant potential to develop into even broader movements for social and environmental change. For example, the introduction of genetically modified organisms
into the food supply has become a powerful catalyst for social activism, spanning issues of food safety, sustainability, equity, biodiversity, and democracy. Agricultural sustainability and food security are important to each and every person, regardless of economic or social class. Moreover, as discursive symbols, both sustainability and food security are enormously powerful. Youngberg and others (1993) suggest that in its emotional appeal and evocative meanings, sustainability is on par with concepts such as freedom, liberty, and democracy. Yet the extent to which alternative agrifood movements and their activities help create substantial change in the direction of greater environmental sustainability, social equity, and food security remains unclear. In other words, analysis of these rapidly developing alternative discourses and practices lags behind their proliferation in communities and institutions.

This book is a first step toward such an analysis. In it I explore the discourses and practices of alternative agrifood movements and actions and the translation of movement ideals into practice. I focus primarily on the sustainable agriculture and community food security aspects of the alternative agriculture movement. Specifically, I examine how the ideas and practices of sustainable agriculture and community food security have been woven into the dominant agrifood institutions in the United States. In addition, I explore the possibilities this process may hold for improving social and environmental justice in the American agrifood system.

Social Movements and Social Change

Throughout human history, social change has been brought about by people organizing themselves to correct a perceived injustice or inequity. In the United States, food safety laws, women's suffrage, the abolition of slavery, workers' rights to unionize, antihunger programs, the end to the Vietnam War, our very independence as a nation—all were brought about by the collective actions of ordinary people.

There has been some debate about whether alternative agrifood efforts like sustainable agriculture or community food security actually represent social movements at all, or whether they behave more like something more modest, such as special interest groups or affinity groups. This raises the question: What is a social movement? While social scientists devote much thought and analysis to the definition of social movements, Cohen (1985) has pointed out that there is little agreement among theorists on what a social movement is exactly and how it differs from a political party or inter-
est group. Assigning the term "social movement" to a group of actors therefore remains somewhat arbitrary. Many different phenomena have been categorized as social movements, including public-interest lobbies, religious movements, revolutions, and political reform movements (McAdam et al. 1988). The term generally refers to persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo. Collective action becomes a movement when participants refuse to accept the boundaries of established institutional rules and routinized roles. For Darnovsky and others (1995), social movements are collective efforts by socially and politically subordinated people to challenge the conditions and assumptions of their lives.

Within this framework, can any alternative agrifood effort legitimately be called a social movement? To answer this question, I refer to Scott (1990), who proposes that a social movement is a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and a common identity. The issue of self-perception is crucial to this definition. That is, if the participants in sustainable agriculture and community food security groups refer to what they are doing as a social movement—and they do—there is little purpose in scholarly questioning of their terminology. However imperfectly articulated and integrated, a large group of people working together to achieve sustainability and community food security is considered to be, and should be referred to as, a social movement.

Alternative agrifood movements have similarities in themes and strategies with other progressive social movements. Merchant (1992) situates the movement for sustainable agriculture within the environmental and ecofeminist movements. These types of movements, which began to take shape in the 1970s, are new in the sense that their objectives are not delimited by objectives such as increased workers' power or national liberation, as were "old" social movements.1 There is nothing new about concerns like women's rights, peace, and the environment. These issues have long been with us, but were probably suppressed in the old social movements (Frank and Fuentes 1990). Common themes of new social movements are struggles for a democratic, postpatristerial society (Cohen 1985), often centered on specific political goals or recognition of rights. New social movements are increasing in strength and importance; they inspire and mobilize people more than the "old" ones do (Frank and Fuentes 1990). These movements

1. To bypass the issue of new versus old Cohen (1985) has suggested the term "contemporary" social movements to describe the movements that have developed since the 1970s.
are driven not only by abstract social issues but also by concerns about their participants’ own life conditions and identities, issues that they experience in daily life. Perhaps because of this immediacy, these movements have become quite powerful.

Discourse and Social Movements

In this book I focus on discourse because of its centrality in the constitution and efficacy of social movements. By “discourse” I mean the ensemble of social, political, and cultural languages, meanings, codes, and relationships that construct, maintain, or challenge the social order. It is the process through which social reality comes into being.

Discourse is what forms and maintains social movement identity. In fact, for some, discourse is primarily what a social movement is. For Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 3), for example, the concepts, ideas, and intellectual activities—the cognitive praxis—of a social movement are what give the movement its identity and its particular meaning. For them, cognitive praxis is the core activity of a social movement, and this cognitive territory is what transforms a group of individuals into a social movement. “It is precisely in the creation, articulation, and formulation of new thoughts and ideas—new knowledge—that a social movement defines itself in society” (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 3). Discourse is not only constitutive of social movements; it is also one of the primary tools movements employ to work toward social change.

For many analysts, the primary power of social movements is discursive, that is, it lies substantially in their ability to challenge dominant perspectives and priorities by raising new issues, changing popular consciousness, and opening new arenas of public policy. Power is embodied in and exercised through discourse. Control of discourse by institutional and societal power holders is a key factor in maintaining power (Fairclough 2001). The discursive construction of reality is a crucial realm of power for social movements that do not control major economic resources or the formal political process. While government and economic resources are major loci of power in society, another is ability to define situations (Wallerstein 1990). Discursive struggles are therefore crucial arenas for instigating changes in cultural and material conditions and within institutions.

One of the key functions of a social movement is to challenge and “rehabilitate” social institutions, to “reform” public space so that new ideas and relationships can develop. It is through discourse that dominant ideas within organizations and institutions are produced, reproduced, contested, and transformed (Fairclough 1994: 10). The relationship between the discourse of social movements and that of social institutions is dialectical. That is, as movements reshape institutions, institutions also reshape movements. Social institutions both determine and are produced by discourse. Discourse simultaneously reflects and creates social reality. It is in this discursive space that the present study is located.

Studying Alternative Agrifood Movements

Since most alternative agrifood ideas and practices have emerged relatively recently (or only recently come under academic scrutiny), research analyzing alternative agrifood discourses and practices is still in its infancy. According to Kloppenburg and others (1996) this relative paucity of research on alternatives to the agrifood system is also related to the fact that analysts of the food system have tended to focus more on the problems of agribusiness, and less on the work being done to solve those problems. Increasingly, however, scholars are looking closely at the development of these alternatives; research to date on alternative agrifood practices focused mostly on one of three approaches (Allen et al. 2003)—identification, classification, and analysis.

The first approach consists primarily of identifying and describing these alternatives—a kind of affirmation that people are actively engaged in developing alternative food pathways and institutions (see, for example, Henderson 1998). The second has had a more instrumental focus, evaluating various types of agrifood alternatives in terms of their potential for helping different populations or sectors such as small-scale farmers, food-based entrepreneurs, or regional economies (e.g., Ilbery and Kneafsey 1999 and Kolodinsky and Pelch 1997). The third approach focuses on analyzing specific expressions of alternative agrifood efforts, such as direct marketing (e.g., Hinrichs 2000) or community-supported agriculture (CSA) (e.g., DeLind and Ferguson 1999). It still remains for researchers to study the constellation of agrifood alternatives. In an effort to develop this research agenda, I have undertaken in this book to analyze the discourse and practices of the alternative agrifood movement and their integration into traditional agrifood institutions in the United States.

As I have argued before, this kind of analysis is important for enabling alternative agrifood efforts to accomplish their goals and minimize potentially contradictory outcomes. Those working in alternative food movements...
have neither the time nor often the inclination to study the larger context of their work. While committed people work in many different areas of the food system to effect change, those embroiled in direct action, whether on farms, in nongovernmental organizations, in laboratories, or in agrifood businesses, rarely have the opportunity to analyze their efforts. Yet this type of analytical process can reveal possibilities for and obstacles to success that may be obscured by the demands of day-to-day work. Marsden and Arce (1995) point out that without close, empirical studies of food systems, we are likely to miss not only understanding how such systems work but also—and perhaps more important—how they might change.

This work also attempts to fill a gap in the study of social movements. Eyeran and Jamison (1991) write that sociologists have generally ignored the cognitive dimensions of activities in the movements they study, focusing instead on actions such as the mobilization of resources, organizational methods, and campaign strategies. For many sociologists knowledge and identity are seen as nonempirical objects and therefore outside the range of what can be studied. Other scholars of social movements focus on the identities of the movements, but study them primarily by reference to theories of social change and philosophies of history.

My subject in this book is primarily the discourse of the alternative agrifood movements in the United States generally and in California in particular. This subject matter includes the assumptions shared by participants in the movement as well as the specific topics or issues around which the movements are created, that is to say, their cognitive content. What are the core assumptions and positions of the movements? How far do they take us on a path to an environmentally sounder and more equitable agrifood system? I am also interested in how alternative agrifood discourses have been integrated into major agrifood institutions. What has been the record and effect of this integration? What is the potential of the alternative discourses and practices supported by the movements themselves?

The data for this analysis come from several sources. These include the projects funded by public programs in sustainable agriculture and community food security, publications by leaders and participants in the alternative agrifood movement, interviews with key people in these traditional agrifood institutions and alternative agrifood organizations, surveys and interviews of farmers and consumers, and my own observations as a long-time participant in alternative agrifood movements.

I also used textual sources: institutional grant programs in sustainable agriculture and community food security; published documents, including program reports, pamphlets, and manuscripts written by program leaders; and alternative agrifood movement publications, presentations, and conference programs. Institutional grant programs in sustainable agriculture and community food security are social forms where discourse and practices are evident and formalized. In these we can see which ideas and practices are preferred and privileged, and which are downplayed or omitted. Published documents written by program leaders reveal collective institutional priorities and perspectives. Alternative agrifood movement publications, presentations, and conference programs represent the self-identified perspectives and priorities of alternative agrifood movements.

Of course, real people carry out relationships between and within institutions. An investigation of people’s self-understanding is crucial to learning more about the meaning and potential of sustainable agriculture and community food security discourse and practice. Therefore, I interviewed key people in the movements and the institutions. These interviews are “triangulated” by my own observations at alternative agrifood conferences and meetings, based upon my “position” within the movements. Because I have myself been involved in the movement for sustainable agriculture for nearly twenty years, and in the community food security movement almost since its inception, I am also a participant observer. I initiated and organized the first University of California conference on sustainable agriculture in January 1985, at a time when the very concept of sustainability was considered heretical within the agricultural establishment. In 1995 I organized a community food security project in Santa Cruz, California. I collaborated on developing the original proposal and was a participant in a California organizational collaboration on agricultural sustainability and food-system issues, and I have attended and taken part in numerous alternative agrifood meetings and activities over the years. Thus I have had many opportunities to bypass the academic isolationism that Epstein (1990: 39) criticizes in the study of social movements. In her view, the absence of a “vital intellectual connection” to social movements leads researchers to develop theories “more about than for the movements.”

Discovering how people working in the alternative agrifood movement and agrifood institutions view the world and how they see their place in challenging and reshaping the agrifood system represents an essential step for better understanding the sites of and possibilities for change in the agrifood system. Yet these perspectives are rarely studied. According to Kloppenburg and others (2000), conceptual framings of alternative food systems have been devised primarily by academics and policy specialists,
but so far, none of these perspectives reflects the full range of understandings among those producers and consumers who constitute the bulk of the movement. In their study of the meaning of food-system sustainability within a broad cross section of the alternative agrifood community, Kloppenburg and others found that popular meanings of sustainability often differed significantly from the definitions of academics and professional advocates. They assert that it is essential to include the perspectives of “ordinary people,” who are, after all, the “principal agents of change in the efforts to recreate the food system.”

An intensive study of subjectivity is beyond the scope of this book; however, I draw on three studies in which I was involved to include the perspectives and priorities of participants in alternative agrifood movements and practices. The earliest of these is a survey of California agrifood organizations that I conducted in the fall and winter of 1996–97 under the auspices of the California Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (CASA). This survey, the first of its kind, gathered information on organization mission statements, conceptions of sustainability and food security, and projects and activities. The initial list of organizations was compiled by CASA members and was supplemented through conversations with these initial groups. Organizations were targeted because they are more influential than individuals and because their perspectives are the products of larger discussions and deliberations and more closely represent the views of their constituencies. Although results from the survey are more illustrative than definitive, they nonetheless provide a picture of the perspectives and priorities of respondent organizations. We received 71 questionnaires out of 106, a response rate of 34 percent.

The second study is one I conducted with a research team at the University of California, Santa Cruz, on alternative agrifood institutions (AFIS) in California. AFIS are the collective efforts of people to build food systems that are more environmentally sound and socially just than the conventional food system. This research focused on the subjectivity of “agents,” that is to say, the people who actually do the work of developing agrifood alternatives in California. Our goal was to document how people express agency in reaction to the problems they perceive in the agrifood system as well as to reflect their self-perceptions of their actions. In the first phase of this research, we focused on the leaders, since leadership is considered to be a crucial ingredient in the trajectory and success of these organizations. Through her work with numerous community-based food organizations, Feenstra (1997) determined that the first key element for developing sustainable, equitable food systems is leadership by clearly identifiable leaders who can build strategic relationships. Thus, in conducting this research project, our hope was not only to gather information about an organization and its activities but also to learn more about the perspectives of the leaders who guide and direct each organization.

For this phase of the study we identified eighty California organizations that fit within a general typology of alternative agrifood organizations. Of these eighty organizations, we selected forty-five that represented a range of activities intended to change the way food is produced, consumed, or distributed. Programs offered by these organizations included alternative agrifood education programs, therapeutic agriculture programs, local and regional food labels, agrifood microenterprises, urban agriculture and community gardens, food policy advocacy, farm-to-school programs, community-supported agriculture, and farmers’ markets. Contacts with these organizations resulted in a list of thirty-seven that were still in existence and able to participate in the study. Geographically, the distribution of our study sample reflected the population densities of these alternative agrifood organizations in California. Organizations were often located in both northern California (mostly near the San Francisco Bay area) and southern California (mostly in and around the Los Angeles area). Our goal in this study was neither statistical rigor nor generalizability. Rather, it was to learn about the worldviews and transformative potential of alternative food efforts by listening to the perspectives and insights of their leaders as expressed through in-depth interviews.

Research team members conducted semi-structured interviews with organization leaders, primarily face-to-face, supplemented by telephone interviews where in-person interviews were not possible. In each case, the interviewee was sent a list of the interview questions beforehand so they could provide thought-out, rather than spur-of-the-moment, responses. The questionnaire was designed to collect basic information about the organization’s history, activities, obstacles, and influences. It also provided
opportunities for AF1 leaders to share their perceptions of key problems and solutions in the food system, their vision for a better food system, and their motivations for being involved in alternative food work. In these interviews we collected basic information about the organization's history, activities, obstacles, and influences. Each interview was taped, transcribed, coded, and tabulated.

The third study focused on community-supported agriculture on the Central Coast of California. Community-supported agriculture is an alternative approach to food production and provision in which consumers pay farmers at the beginning of the growing season; in exchange they receive a weekly share of produce. The purpose of this study was to document how community-supported agriculture was being implemented in this area, to assess the extent to which groups practicing community-supported agriculture (CSAs) were meeting the goals ascribed to them in the alternative agrifood movement and to identify the opportunities and constraints on meeting these goals. In this study we wanted to obtain the perspectives of both producers and supporting community members. For producers, data were collected both through in-depth interviews with twelve community-supported farmers (out of fourteen in the area) and a written questionnaire. Information on member experiences and perspectives was gathered through a written questionnaire included in the members' boxes or sent through the mail. We received 274 responses to the 638 surveys delivered to members, a response rate of 43 percent. In addition, we held three focus groups with seventeen members of five different farms. Focus group members were self-selected by identifying their interest in participating on their written questionnaires.

While the information about alternative agrifood institutions in this book has been gathered from a number of sources using multiple methods, it is less inclusive in its geographic reach. All of the data and examples come from the United States.

Area of Focus: United States and California

This research focuses primarily on alternative agrifood movements in California and in the rest of the United States because of the worldwide economic and political significance of their agrifood systems. The dissemination of the American model of production and consumption to other countries, combined with technological leadership and unchallenged supremacy of the United States in world markets, has "effectively established an international food order under North American hegemony" (Marsden and Little 1990: 26). American leadership in agricultural production volume and sales is beyond dispute. The United States exports far more edible agricultural products than any other country—almost half again as much as the next highest export country, which is France (Food and Agriculture Organization 1996). And it is partly due to this economic power that American food production systems and technologies are promoted and emulated throughout the world.

Within the United States, California possesses the premier food and agricultural system. As the world's sixth-largest economy, with a land mass roughly equivalent to that of the United Kingdom, and home to 34 million people, California is almost more like a country than a state. It has led the nation in agricultural production and income for nearly fifty years, and its agricultural economy ranks sixth among nations as an exporter of agricultural products. In part because of its climate, productive soils, and irrigation system, California ranks first in the nation in agricultural production value for 75 crop and livestock commodities, generating $24.8 billion in sales in 1996 (California Farm Bureau Federation 1998). California agriculture is one of the most diversified in the world, producing over 250 different crop and livestock commodities, with no single crop dominating the state's agricultural economy. Although its 30 million acres of farmland account for only 3 percent of the country's total, it produces 55 percent of the nation's fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

Long held up as an exemplar for the rest of the nation and often the world, California's agrifood system is assuming a leadership role in the domains of sustainable agriculture and community food security as well. Within the state, organic farming is a significant and growing industry, generating $95.1 million in sales in 1995, a 26 percent increase over the previous two years (Torto and Klonsky 1998). California has extensive experience in all aspects of sustainable agriculture. As a result of the organizing efforts of California Certified Organic Growers, as early as 1978 California developed legal standards for organic agriculture in California. This law was used as a model by the group drawing up the rule that became federal policy in 2002. Another institutional marker is that the national office of the CFSC was established and remains in California, and 25 percent of its membership resides there.

California provides an excellent opportunity for studying the possibilities of a movement that combines environmentalism and justice in food and
agriculture. Because of the ways in which California agriculture differs from that of America's agricultural “heartland,” there may be greater potential in California than in other agricultural regions for the development of alternative movements. Unlike agriculture in many parts of the country, California agriculture has been explicitly capitalist from the start, underscoring many of the contradictions that the sustainability and food security movements address.

From the beginning, California agriculture was based on the intensive extraction of natural resources and the reconfiguring of nature according to the logic of intensive agricultural production for export. California agriculture is based on extensive irrigation systems and the intensive use of fertilizers. The same long growing season and mild winters that enable the high production of so many fruit and vegetable crops also allows pest populations to grow, leading to high rates of pesticide application.

California is also the nation's first and most extensive example of highly concentrated agriculture, with over 50 percent of production controlled by only 10 percent of the farmers by the end of the 1920s (Jelinek 1982). While large-scale agribusiness is a feature of agriculture throughout the country, corporate involvement has tended to be in input, marketing, and processing rather than in direct production. The entry of large corporations in farm production has been the exception in most parts of the United States (Pfeffer 1992), but not in California. Agricultural land ownership has been highly concentrated in the West since the arrival of Europeans, and this concentration led to the creation of a dual system of capitalist farmers and wage laborers (FitzSimmons 1990).

While in most parts of the United States farm production is based on family or tenant labor, California agriculture has always depended on seasonally employed migratory workers (Martin et al. 1988). More than 85 percent of all of the labor that produces the state's crops and livestock is performed by hired workers (Villarreal et al. 2000). California agriculture presents a clear juxtaposition of deep social inequality with unparalleled abundance. Ironically, the farmworkers who produce and harvest California's bountiful crops comprise one of the populations at greatest risk of hunger. Even in the heart of California's most abundant agricultural region, the Central Valley, children go hungry. The low pay, arduous and dangerous working conditions, and lack of employment security have led to persistent farmworker protests over the years, including a successful interethnic coalition that became the United Farm Workers Union (UFW).

Since at least the 1960s activists in California have raised issues about environmental and social problems in their agrifood system. Environmental concerns focused on agrichemical effects on the environment and groundwater depletion. Social concerns included the plight of farmworkers, the distributive effects of irrigation laws, and the poverty and racism that were part and parcel of the agrifood system. This tradition of activism continues to this day. Today, California has a high density of projects and organizations dedicated to sustainable agriculture and community food security. For example, California is the only state that has developed a statewide community food security organization, the California Community Food Security Network. And, of the five regional Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups, only one is based in a single state, the one in California.

Thus, the social and environmental issues of California's industrialized agrifood system, along with a history of social activism may provide a different type of catalyst for change in California than in other American agricultural regions. Alternative agrifood movements may also have a better chance to flourish within the state's complex and diverse demographic and sociopolitical environment. While conventional agricultural interests are powerful in California, they may be less so than in other states where agriculture is a more significant part of the economy. While California is the nation's leading agricultural producer, farming and related activities contribute only about 8 percent of the gross state product and supply about 8 percent of the jobs in the state (Carter and Goldman 1996). Not only is California's political economy relatively less dependent on agricultural production, but California voters tend to be nonrural and liberal. More than 90 percent of the state's population lives in metropolitan areas, and less than one percent of the state's residents are farmers or ranchers. These conditions pave the way for interests beyond those of conventional producers to help shape the agrifood system of the future.

California provides fertile ground for the development of a progressive alternative agrifood movement. The relatively small contribution of agriculture to the state's current economy, a history of diverse agrifood activism, the emphasis on progressive politics and alternative lifestyles, the high level of cultural diversity, and the degree of involvement with sustainability suggest that if an arm of the movement that joins environmental issues and social justice were to develop anywhere, California would be a likely place.

Primary Themes of the Book

To understand these movements we first need to address why they exist. It is clear that the contemporary agrifood system is not meeting people's food
security needs at present and because of the progressive damage that conventional practices are doing to the environment, this situation is likely to get worse. The conventional agrifood system therefore needs significant changes in order to achieve ecological soundness and social justice. Conventional agriculture has been largely self-negating, depleting the natural resources upon which agricultural processes depend and thus producing barriers to long-term environmental sustainability and food security. These are the core issues for those involved in alternative agrifood movements. Since they are well documented and articulated in many other places, I only summarize them in Chapter 2, where I also outline the development of concepts and movements centered on sustainable agriculture and community food security.

The drive toward environmental soundness and social equity in the agrifood system must be waged on many fronts. Interactions among the larger environmental, social, and economic systems in which agriculture is situated directly influence agricultural production and distribution. This means that solutions need to be found both on and beyond the farm, and that solutions will be not only technical but also social and political as well. Alternative agrifood movements realize that they need to engage with the agrifood institutions, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the land-grant agricultural research system, that have largely configured the current agrifood system. I discuss how the alternative agrifood movement has accomplished this engagement in Chapter 3, in which I review the institutionalization and key features of national and California programs in sustainable agriculture and community food security. Alternative agrifood movements are also developing concrete alternatives to current methods of production and distribution. In Chapter 3, I also highlight some of the alternative production and marketing practices featured by alternative agrifood movements.

What this book contributes to these efforts is an analysis of how alternatives are moving the agrifood system in the direction of environmental soundness and social equity. Through this review it is clear that the movements have made significant progress in developing alternatives to the current agrifood system and in integrating alternative discourses into dominant agrifood institutions. In many instances, they have challenged and are beginning to change the discourse and practice of these institutions. Discursive space has been carved out for sustainability and food security, and research agendas and methods are consequently beginning to change. These incremental changes are setting the stage for even broader and deeper transformations in major agrifood institutions.

Yet although new alternative agrifood discourses are being established, many traditional, conventional agrifood discourses remain. Chapter 4 identifies and examines both these emergent and residual discourses. In some ways, the institutional forms of sustainable agriculture and community food security have been constructed such that their problems are remediable within the structures of existing institutions. These institutions, in turn, shape the accepted frameworks of sustainable agriculture and community food security. Buttel (1997), for example, points out that although the sustainable agriculture movement is based upon broad social values, its effectiveness within traditional institutions is a based upon promoting a set of technical practices institution leaders consider both comprehensible and relatively noncontroversial.

This process occurs without any group necessarily intending it to happen. For example, the focus on natural science and technology can be seen as an accommodation to the institutions in which these approaches have been privileged and with which their scientists and administrators are familiar. Yet developing an environmentally sound and socially equitable agrifood system requires a larger epistemological framework for analysis than that of traditional agricultural science in order to find common ground and see beyond constructed dichotomies such as production and consumption. One approach suggested for analysis and action is a political ecological framework in which causes of and solutions to problems in the agrifood system are seen as both natural and social.

There is a narrow, and permeable, boundary between residual and emergent—the old and the new—discourse and practice, both within agricultural institutions and within the alternative movements themselves. Chapter 5 explores how the movements may be reproducing some of the discursive approaches and ideologies of the dominant agrifood system, such as economic liberalism and individualism, in which nonsustainability and food insecurity are embedded. For example, while farmers may embrace the idea of sustainability, they face the reality of competition; they are driven by the same economic considerations that conventional farmers are. Within the exigencies of the market economy, one must make a profit or get out. Untangling these kinds of Gordian knots requires self-reflection on movement discourses and ideologies.

A crucial discursive step is to clearly define and articulate principles and characteristics of an agrifood system that is based upon environmental soundness and social justice so that the concept of sustainability, for example, cannot be as easily co-opted as it seems to be at the moment. Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to how these principles are interpreted
and implemented. For example, many alternative agrifood organizations and programs have vision and goal statements that are broad and inclusive, focusing on environmental soundness and social justice for all food-system participants. In institutions such as sustainable agriculture grant programs or in practices such as alternative marketing strategies, discourse includes everyone. However, these goals tend to narrow as they become operationalized, and at the level of implementation, stakeholder groups such as farmworkers may be excluded entirely.

It is not surprising, then, that sustainability and food security discourse undergoes a narrowing from principles to practices within traditional agrifood institutions. What is possibly more problematic—and also more solvable—is the extent to which this narrowing happens within the alternative movements as well, thereby limiting the claims and changes they attempt to make. This constriction may also be embedded in some of the discourses and ideologies of these movements. Given the central role played by discourse in social movements, it is crucial that this discourse work toward solving rather than reproducing the problems that gave rise to the movement in the first place.

Another issue that bears examination is that of power and participation both in the current agrifood system and in the alternatives promoted by the movement. The primary participants in alternative agrifood movements closely resemble the participants in conventional agriculture in class, gender, and ethnicity. Participants in alternative agrifood movements are caught in power relations and discursive and ideological strangleholds similar to those of conventional agriculture. Chapter 6 addresses issues of authentic democracy as refracted through the prisms of privileged voices, material power, and gender and explores possibilities for deepening and expanding participation in alternative agrifood movements. Given uneven resource allocations among different groups of people, this emergent inclusiveness in turn requires exploring the possibility of democratizing both movements and institutions. So far there has been little discussion of how historically marginalized people can gain access to resources such as education, property, and capital that can give them equal footing in discursive spaces. It is unlikely that a runner who is placed far behind the starting line can catch up with the rest of the field, and this is an issue that needs to be addressed even if it is not clear how it can be resolved.

One of the current major efforts at developing sustainable, just, and democratic agrifood systems focuses on the creation of localized food systems. While these efforts make sense at face value, in Chapter 7 I explore some concerns about the implications of the drive toward food-system localization. These include concerns about the fundamental asymmetries of power within communities and the enormous differences in wealth and resources from one community to another.

In Chapter 8, I look into the current configurations of U.S. food and agricultural policy, including the demographics of the decision-making arrangements that created these policies. After discussing the importance of building broad-based alliances for developing alternative agrifood systems, I address some of the challenges inherent in this kind of effort. I conclude by highlighting emerging alliances for social and environmental justice in the agrifood system.

Now that agricultural sustainability and community food security programs are becoming institutionalized, to what degree should alternative agrifood movements seek further reforms and to what degree should they push for deeper changes in areas such as property relations, participatory democracy, and productive justice? Chapter 9 addresses the very real and troubling tension between reform and transformation faced by all social movements. While building on institutional success, alternative agrifood movements will also need to acknowledge and address the deeper structural and cultural patterns that constrain coordinated efforts to resolve social and environmental problems in the agrifood system. Several steps are crucial to this process: (1) developing a vision for a sustainable and food-secure society; (2) working to understand the causes for a nonsustainable and food insecure society and removing ideological blinders; and (3) realizing that people working together can transform the agrifood system, even at its most fundamental levels. Achieving agricultural sustainability and food security requires both the development of alternative practices and a political struggle over rights, justice, and equity. Whether the future in which we find ourselves is better or worse than the present will depend in large part on the evolving alternative agrifood movements simultaneously prioritizing issues of environmental and human degradation.

This book is an exploration of the concerns, claims, discourses, and practices in the alternative agrifood movement. My intention is to offer information and insights that can contribute to the reflexive efforts of the alternative agrifood movement as it continues to develop. My approach is "critical" in the sense that I attempt to ferret out meanings and connections that may be hidden from view as alternative agrifood advocates pursue the day-to-day actions in which they are engaged. It is not critical in
the sense of criticizing people or their efforts as they work to change the agrifood system. I have only the utmost respect and esteem for the many people who work against long odds to develop a sustainable food system that provides sustenance for all. Through this work, I hope to provide some illumination along the path toward a more environmentally sound and socially just agrifood system, one that provides for us for both now and indefinitely into the future.

Throughout human history problems and resulting protests over them have been a feature of agrifood systems, with different issues and social movements rising to prominence at different times. Today people are increasingly aware of the fragile state of America’s agrifood system. Contemporary alternative agrifood movements did not, of course, burst forth suddenly, like Athena from the head of Zeus. They have roots in or affinities with previous social movements such as the abolitionist, populist, environmental, anti-hunger, and food safety movements. While there are a number of contemporary alternative agrifood movements, this book focuses on two of the most comprehensive and prominent, the movements for sustainable agriculture and for community food security. These movements have developed both as legacies of and in reaction to traditional conceptualizations and practices in the American agrifood system. This chapter begins with a review of some of the issues and problems that have inspired contemporary alternative agrifood movements and then highlights some of the agrifood movements of the past. It then turns specifically to the concepts and development of the movements for sustainable agriculture and community food security.

Issues in Sustenance and Sustainability

Today’s prominent agrifood concerns are the issues of sustenance and sustainability. To better understand the discourses of sustenance and sustain-
ability, I categorize these issues as centered around three main themes: food, environment, and livelihood and life chances. Food issues include those of food access and hunger, nutrition, and food safety. Environmental issues span a spectrum from depletion of natural resources such as soil and water to the deleterious effects of agrichemicals such as groundwater contamination by fertilizers and pest resistance to pesticides. In the category of livelihood and life chances, I include issues such as the working conditions of farm laborers and the concentrated ownership of farmland and food and agrifood businesses.

Food

No other commodity is more essential than food—like water, it is absolutely required for human survival. Access to water, however, has not yet been determined by one's ability to pay for it, although in some places this is beginning to change. Everyone—regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or social class—needs to eat in order to live. Yet at least 500 million people, mostly women and children, are chronically undernourished, and many more lack the proper diet for a healthy, active life (U.N. World Food Council 1990). In a world that produces enough food for all, each day forty thousand people die of hunger and hunger-related causes (Speth 1992). While those at greatest risk of hunger are women and children living in rural areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, many Americans also go hungry.

Indeed, a defining contradiction of American agriculture has been the persistence of hunger despite its having the world's most productive agrifood system. As mentioned in Chapter 1, American agriculture is legendary in its levels of productivity. The United States produces plenty of food for its own population and enough to support an enormous export program. Yields in most crops have increased dramatically since the first part of the 1960s, and Americans on average spend only about 10 percent of their incomes on food—a much lower percentage than in any other country. We have access to a much more diverse diet than at any point in the past and in many ways are much better nourished than ever before.

Still, many Americans do not have enough to eat. In 1990, 31 million Americans were considered food insecure by the USDA, and food insecurity is on the rise. For example, while in the 1980s there were fewer than thirty emergency food centers in New York, today there are thirteen hundred. Hunger is unevenly distributed among different groups of people. Those most likely to suffer from food insecurity are people of color, the elderly, the disabled, inner-city residents, farmworkers, and children. Of 31 million people considered food insecure, close to 40 percent were children. Sadly, children go hungry even in California's Central Valley, a showcase of modern agricultural productivity. In California—the wealthiest state in the world's wealthiest nation—1.4 million children are hungry or at risk of hunger (True 1992). Since America's ability to produce food is not in question, providing adequate nutrition for everyone clearly involves factors that go far beyond achieving sufficient food production.

Given that food is treated as a commodity, it is axiomatic that the primary cause of food insecurity is poverty. For many, the economic picture in much of both urban and rural America is bleak, with wages often too low to keep many workers out of poverty, particularly women and ethnic minorities. In rural America in the late 1980s, for example, one-fourth of children lived in poverty, even though 75 percent of them lived in a household with at least one working adult (O'Hare 1988). Since the need for food is related to biology, not economics, a person with a low income needs to spend a higher percentage of his or her income to meet basic food needs than does a middle- or high-income person. In addition, poor people often pay higher prices for their food. Because of supermarket redlining in low-income communities, in many poor neighborhoods the only food stores are small businesses whose low volume of sales means that they cannot acquire food at low cost and therefore cannot charge low prices to their customers. In addition, even in supermarkets, food prices in low-income communities are often higher than those in other areas.

While hunger is the key problem for many Americans, for others it can be the overabundance of food. In the United States rich and poor alike struggle to escape the new plague of diseases caused by consuming too much and the wrong kinds of food. Many of the major American diseases are related to dietary excesses and imbalances. For the two-thirds of Americans who neither smoke nor drink excessively, "One personal choice seems to influence long-term health prospects more than any other—what we eat" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1988). For example, obesity and physical inactivity account for more than 300,000 premature deaths in the United States each year, second only to deaths related to tobacco use (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2000). Childhood obesity has become a national epidemic. Dietary excess has long been associated with the leading causes of death in the United States such as cardiovascular diseases (coronary artery disease, stroke, and high blood pressure), cancers (colon, breast, and prostate), and type 2 diabetes (McGinnis and Foege 1993). The food industry spends huge amounts of money each year to get Americans to buy foods not based on
cultural. Since agriculture depends upon the primary appropriation of nature, it is a special case of the intersection of production and environment (Mann and Dickinson 1980). Even in its industrialized form, agriculture remains dependent upon natural resources and processes such as soil, water, and weather. Rates of production are limited by natural constraints such as growth cycles, weather, and length of day. Agricultural production begins in nature as resources are transformed into food. It ends in nature as waste products and pollution from materials applied to it in attempts to control the constraints of nature (e.g., pesticides and fertilizers). The production and distribution of food is the outgrowth of a highly visible, intensive relation between people and the environment.

Agriculture's direct dependence upon natural resources and processes makes it impossible to obscure environmental destruction in the agrifood system. In places where agriculture has produced abundance, it has often done so at the cost of environmental quality. Much of this destruction has been concealed in technological innovations such as new developments in fertilizers, pesticides, and cultivation techniques that have enabled continued increases in production. Yet these innovations present their own problems—pesticides produce pests, irrigation produces groundwater depletion, cultivation produces soil erosion.

The discovery of insecticides based on synthetic organic compounds around the time of World War II greatly increased the use and consequences of pesticides in agriculture. In a very short time they were being used on almost every crop in most countries of the world (Conway and Pretty 1991). Any increased application of pesticides intensifies future needs for more chemical toxins, as pests develop resistance to standard preparations. Losses to pest resistance have already severely reduced or destroyed agricultural industries in several parts of the world, since pest resistance renders pesticide application a self-negating process. In California, for example, pesticides are responsible for the growth of secondary pest populations, which now comprise twenty-four of the state's twenty-five major crop pests (Metcalf and Luckmann 1982). While pesticide use in the United States increased 1,000 percent between the 1940s and the 1980s, crop losses to insect pests also increased by almost 50 percent (Pimentel et al. 1991).

The pesticides used extensively in modern agricultural production damage wildlife, beneficial insects, ecosystems, and humans. Since less than 0.1 percent of pesticides applied in the United States actually reach the pests to which they are targeted (Pimentel and Levitan 1986), pesticides end up in the bodies of wildlife or the water people drink. Agriculture is the most prominent cause of species endangerment in this country (U.S. Forest

Environment

No other commodity is as "natural" as food. While all commodities begin and end in "nature," this is particularly clear in the case of food and agrifood.
Service 1994). Similarly, non-point-source pollution from agriculture is the major contributor to water-quality problems in America's surface water, and agriculture contributes to pollution in over one-half of the assessed streams, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs suffering impairments (House 1993). The herbicide atrazine, a carcinogen and endocrine disrupter, causes more health violations in tap water than any other chemical regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (Environmental Working Group 2000). Pesticide contamination can remain long after the compound is no longer used. In California, for example, the long-banned pesticide DDT, one of the most potent carcinogens known, still contaminates the water of 1 million Californians at levels that are almost three hundred times the "safe" level for infants and children (Environmental Working Group California 1999). According to the Office of Technology Assessment (1995a: 8–9), "Overall, water quality suffers most from its association with agriculture. Agriculture ranks as the primary contributor to today's surface water quality problems, principally through sediment deposition and agrichemical runoff from dryland and irrigated systems." Soil compaction caused by heavy cultivation, land salinization caused by salt build-up from irrigation, and changes in soil biology caused by fertilizer use also threaten agricultural productivity.

In addition to resource degradation, resource depletion is a major problem. Approximately one-third of the original topsoil has been removed from U.S. cropland in the past two hundred years (Pimentel et al. 1994), and much of U.S. cropland erodes at rates that exceed government-established tolerance levels. The extensive use of groundwater for irrigation has meant that declining water tables have become common in many agricultural regions. As early as the 1970s, agriculture was depleting groundwater at the rate of 11 billion gallons per day (U.S. Water Resources Council 1978). Resource depletion and degradation have caused the abandonment or threaten to cause the abandonment of farming systems through groundwater depletion, soil salinization, and unmanageable pest problems caused by pesticide use (Locke and ert 1986). In the United States, an estimated one billion hectares of arable land has been lost to erosion, salinization, and waterlogging (Pimentel et al. 1976). Worldwide, these same processes are causing an irretrievable loss of an estimated 6 million hectares per year (Pimentel 1993).

Even this limited number of examples illustrates the severity of environmental problems in the agrifood system. Not only is agriculture responsible for pollution, but agricultural practices are contributing to the destruction of the environmental conditions of production upon which agriculture itself depends.

Livelihood and Life Changes

In some ways, the current agrifood system also destroys the dignity and opportunities of particular groups of people. Inequitable social relations are deeply embedded in food and agriculture systems throughout the world. Gender and racial oppression have functioned as primary organizing principles, and labor exploitation is the rule.

The American agrifood system is one that embodies and has depended upon extremely unequal material and social relations among groups of people. For example, in California some of the richest agricultural areas are home to some of the poorest people in the entire United States. In fact, increases in income from agriculture have been associated with increasing levels of poverty (MacCannell 1988). Farmworkers have the lowest family income of any occupation surveyed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Half of U.S. farmworker families have incomes below the poverty line, with the median family income between $7,500 and $10,000 a year (GAO 1992). This figure is particularly striking in that 1.5 percent of U.S. farms with the highest sales employ over half of the farm labor (Slesinger and Pfeffer 1992). And at the end of the workday, many farmworkers do not have a home to which to retreat. The only national data on farmworker housing show that in 1980, housing was available for only about one-third of the estimated 1.2 million migrant farmworkers who needed it (GAO 1992). Most farmworkers live in extremely overcrowded conditions; others end up sleeping in caves, under bridges, or in cardboard shanties. Many still work without access to restrooms or fresh drinking water, although access to these so-called amenities was a central goal of labor-organizing efforts as far back as the early 1900s.

Difficult working conditions are endemic throughout the food and agriculture sector, not just in the fields. Workers in the produce and meat-processing industries are often poorly paid, seasonally terminated, receive no benefits, and work under miserable conditions. In the 1980s, Iowa meat-packing industry wages decreased regularly, and 49 percent of Iowa meat-packing workers suffered work-related injuries or illnesses in 1990 (Senate 1990). These plants are increasingly staffed by recent immigrants who have few income-earning options and little ability to protest their working conditions. In Hamlet, North Carolina, twenty-five workers were killed and
forty-nine were injured when they could not escape a fire the Imperial chicken-processing plant because the emergency exit doors were locked. Congressman George Miller summed up the situation by saying that this was an industry that decided to subsidize its profits “with the broken lives, limbs, lacerations, and decapitations of their workers” (House 1991: 16). These kinds of working conditions are enabled by the highly uneven distribution of control and ownership in the U.S. food and agriculture industry, a level of concentration that affords workers little power to change either their working conditions or their jobs.

The U.S. food and agriculture system is highly concentrated in production, retailing, and land ownership. At the level of production, only 7 percent of American farms received 60 percent of the net cash farm income in 1992 (USDA 1994). As for marketing, at the beginning of the 1990s two companies controlled 50 percent of grain exports; three companies slaughtered nearly 80 percent of the beef; four companies controlled nearly 85 percent of the cold cereal market; and four companies milled nearly 60 percent of the flour (Krebs 1991). Similarly, the food service industry is dominated by only three companies. There is also a long-term trend toward larger and fewer grocery stores across the United States. Supermarket chains dominate grocery retailing, accounting for four out of every five dollars spent in retail food stores (Geithman and Marion 1993). In 2000, the top five food retailers (Kroger, Albertson’s, Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Arnold) controlled 42 percent of the market (Hendrickson et al. 2001).

Land ownership is also highly concentrated. Only 5 percent of American landowners own 80 percent of the land (Hansen 1999). Compare this to the situation in Brazil—a country considered to be an extreme case of land concentration—where 3 percent of the landowners own 56 percent of the arable land. And although African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans have been essential to the productivity of American agriculture, they are much less likely than whites to be farm operators and much more likely to be farmworkers. Although they comprise nearly 25 percent of the population, nonwhites operate a mere 2 percent of the farms in the United States (Census Bureau 1987). Even in California, an ethnically diverse state where 43 percent of the population is nonwhite, less than 7 percent of farm operators are nonwhite (Census Bureau 1987). In contrast, California’s farm labor force is composed almost exclusively of ethnic minorities (Peck 1980).

Alternative agrifood movements have arisen in response to these kinds of food security, environmental, and livelihood problems in the American agrifood system. While agrifood system problems may be more severe and more publicized today, neither the problems nor the organizing around agrifood issues is new in America.

### Alternative Agrifood Movements in Historical Context

For over a century, conditions in American food and agriculture have led to or been associated with resistance movements such as the populist, environmental, antihunger, and food safety movements.

Issues related to family-farm viability and market concentration were raised by the agrarian populist movement of the late 1890s. During the thirty-year period following the end of the Civil War in 1865, agricultural production increased dramatically. Agricultural export earnings went from $79 million in 1865 to $2.42 million in 1881 for crude foodstuffs (Havens 1986). Post–Civil War industrialization and government monetary policy eventually produced a situation in which farmers experienced generally declining prices while the costs of shipping their products, purchasing farm inputs, and obtaining necessary credit increased (Adamson and Borgos 1984). This led to the rise of political action intent upon easing the plight of farmers and to the creation of political parties such as the Populists and the Greenbacks. These parties saw the power of the banks, railroads, and monopolies as central to the economic problems experienced by farmers. Their platform included regulation of the railroads, expansion of the national money supply (to lower interest rates), legal recognition of trade unions, and taxation on speculative real estate profits. Agrarian populism was revived in the late 1960s in defense of the family farm and traditional rural communities (de Janvry 1980). The neopopulists denounced the technological, public-policy, and market advantages that large-scale agriculture enjoyed over small-scale farming. In the late 1970s agrarian activism coalesced into the American Agriculture Movement, which promotes the family farm and the importance of agriculture to U.S. economic security (Browne 1988). In 1978 they organized some of the largest farm demonstrations in history when thirty thousand farmers marched in Washington, D.C., to protest American farm policies.

Environmental degradation in agriculture also met with early social criticism, which addressed resource problems in “modern” agriculture at least since the closings of the commons in the 1700s and through the early

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British and U.S. conservationist movements of the 1800s. As agricultural productivity began to decline dramatically in the early nineteenth century both in Europe and the United States, technological efforts to overcome the constraints of nature included chemical and mechanical means, such as the development of artificial fertilizers and tillage equipment. These solutions, however, led to further natural resource problems and were widely recognized and criticized (Foster 1997). For instance, in his "Lectures on Modern Agriculture" of 1859, the eminent soil chemist Justus von Liebig considered the agricultural systems of the time to be forms of "robbery" in which the "conditions of the reproduction" of the soil were destroyed. American economist Henry Carey wrote in 1858 that "Man is but a tenant of the soil, and he is guilty of a crime when he reduces its value for other tenants who are to come after him." During this same period, Karl Marx was also highly critical of the soil-destroying dynamic of capitalist agriculture and believed that humans must cease the wanton destruction of nature. Marx considered "the soil and the worker" to be the fundamental sources of wealth (Marx 1976). Karl Kautsky (1988) understood the concept of diminishing returns to increased agricultural inputs, writing in "The Agrarian Question" of 1899 that artificial fertilizers could only temporarily enrich the soil, not prevent its eventual impoverishment. These cogent early analyses about the sources and dynamics of agricultural resource problems prefigure contemporary concerns about agricultural sustainability. It was not until the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," which raised previously unasked questions about harmful effects of pesticides, that agriculture was featured in the contemporary environmental movement.

Health and food safety movements also have a long history in the United States. As early as the 1830s, for example, vegetarians protested public health recommendations for a heavily meat-based diet (Belasco 1989). At the end of the nineteenth century, the industrialization of the food system gave rise to efforts at reforming such practices as food adulteration (Guthman 1998). For example, dairies artificially colored milk because it turned blue as a result of cows being fed with byproducts of distilleries, and bakeries were accused of adding nonfood substances to their bread to cover up impurities and make it heavier and whiter (Leon and Smith DeWaal 2002). Upton Sinclair's graphic account of the meat-packing industry in his novel "The Jungle" caused an outcry that led to regulations aimed at improving food safety and controlling fraud in the early 1900s. Several decades later, food issues came to the fore again during the time of the civil rights, free speech, and antiwar movements. In the 1960s, food activism was broad-based, including fasts against the war, interracial dining at segregated restaurants, and consumer boycotts in support of agricultural workers (Belasco 1989). This was also the point at which the movement for organic food began to flourish as part of a growing rejection of "mainstream foodways" (Belasco 1989).

During the same period of social activism and growing out of the civil rights movement, the farmworkers' movement focused on working conditions, wages, and pesticide exposure. The earliest agricultural labor movements, of course, were the antislavery movements. These were followed by movements focusing on migrant workers during the Depression. However, reforms in farm labor conditions won by these movements were stalled in 1942 with the advent of the federal "bracero" program (Mooney and Majka 1995). This program brought temporary Mexican workers to the United States to work in the fields. This process ensured an oversupply of workers, which in turn essentially eliminated the ability of workers to organize. The end of the "bracero" program in 1964 coincided with the surge of the civil rights movement. In 1963 Cesar Chavez, coming out of his background as an organizer for a community action agency, became the first leader of the UFW (Mooney and Majka 1995). During the 1970s consumers supported the union through a boycott of table grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo brand wines designed to apply pressure for legislation that would give farmworkers the right to organize without threat of retaliation. This led in 1975 to the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) in California, which protects the rights of farm laborers to organize and choose their own representatives and created the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). During the 1980s, however, Board appointments made by Governor Deukmejian, who sided with growers, rendered the ALRB virtually useless in mediating disputes between growers and workers. This, combined with internal conflict within the UFW, led to a precipitous decline in union membership. In the early 1990s the UFW, under new leadership, undertook a new campaign to unionize strawberry workers in California. This effort, which involved forging an alliance with consumers and the AFL-CIO, focused on both labor and environmental issues. While the history of most farm labor organizing involves opposition between growers and workers, in other areas such as the Midwest, where the labor structure of agriculture is different, there have been efforts in which workers and small farmers have joined forces to advocate changes in food-processing industries. For example, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, recognizing that working conditions were set more by processors than by individual farmers under contract to the processors, worked together with farmers, consumers, other unions, and churches to eventually win better contracts for the workers (Mooney and Majka 1995).
The alternative agrifood movements of today carry on these traditions of activism and have made their voices heard. In the late 1970s debates over farm policy were no longer carried out by exclusively agricultural interests, but now included groups representing the "New Agenda" (Paarlberg 1980), such as those concerned about the environment, food safety, nutrition, and government expenditures. An increased public concern with environmental degradation, for example, led to environmental issues becoming part of farm bill discussions for the first time. Many of the groups that became active during that time are even stronger today.

Some focus on single issues such as food safety, farmland protection, pesticides, farm labor, or organic farming. Others, like the Pesticide Action Network North America, focus on "crossover" issues such as pesticides and farmworker health. Here I focus on two prominent, broad-based alternative agrifood movements, the movement for sustainable agriculture and the movement for community food security. While there is a confluence of issues addressed and strategies used by these movements, each one embodies a somewhat distinct conceptual and political history. Traditionally, advocates of sustainable agriculture have focused more toward rural and production issues, while community food security proponents have concentrated more on urban and consumption issues. For example, in a review of the literature on agricultural sustainability, Lockertz (1988) identifies the problems addressed as environmental contamination by pesticides, plant nutrients, and sediments; loss of soil and degradation of soil quality; vulnerability to shortages of nonrenewable resources, such as fossil energy; and low farm income resulting from depressed commodity prices in the face of high production costs. Problems addressed by the community food security movement, on the other hand, tend to focus more on food and nutrition issues. These include hunger and poor nutrition, high rates of diet-related disease, unprecedented demand on the charitable food sector, abandonment of inner cities by the supermarket industry, the decline of local food systems, and the absence of community or individual empowerment (Fisher and Gottlieb 1995).

The next sections review the development of the concepts of sustainable agriculture and community food security. They illustrate some of the ways these movements differ from conventional agriculture and antihunger paradigms and narrate the rise of these important movements, both nationally and in California.

2. The farm bill is a piece of omnibus legislation first developed during the New Deal. Renewed every five to six years, it covers subsidies to agriculture, research priorities, and funding for food and agriculture and for food stamps.

Sustainable Agriculture

The movement for sustainable agriculture combines issues central to the concerns of populists and environmentalists. In this section I briefly describe the history of the concept of sustainability, discuss the evolution of agricultural sustainability, and look at the creation of organizations dedicated to the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

Concepts of Sustainability

Sustainability binds together otherwise disparate thinking and concerns about the environment and the economy. The 1980s brought about a reorientation of environmentalist thinking in which sustainability became the key concept in development planning and economics (Turner 1988). Dicks (1992) observes that sustainability emerged as a theme that unified environmental concerns voiced during the debates on environmental legislation throughout the 1980s. American interest in sustainability issues since World War II falls into three distinct periods (Rutan 1992). During the first of these, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Americans questioned the adequacy of natural resources to sustain growth. During the second period, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, concerns mounted about the external costs (i.e., costs that are not included in private business calculations) of commodity production, such as industrial pollution, and pesticides in food. The third and present wave of sustainability concerns began in the mid 1980s and focused on transnational issues such as global warming, biodiversity, ozone depletion, and acid rain.

Because of these concerns, environmentalists often found themselves at odds with the goals of economic developers, even when those goals included humanistic objectives such as increasing food security. Most development plans for alleviating poverty and hunger were based on models that involved even greater depletion or degradation of natural resources. During this time the concept of sustainable development emerged in an attempt to resolve the perceived contradiction between environmental conservation and economic growth. Sustainable development has been defined as "a strategy for improving the quality of life while preserving the environmental potential for the future, of living off interest rather than consuming natural capital. . . . The key element of sustainable development is the recognition that economic and environmental goals are inextricably linked" (National Commission on the Environment 1993:2). The publication of _Our Common Future_ by the World Commission on Environment and
Development (1987) catalyzed a new wave of thinking and action around merging priorities of the North and the South under the rubric of sustainability. Less and less were environmentalists inclined to villainize those in the South as destroyers of habitats; instead they searched for ways to blend environmental conservation with economic development. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, for example, promoted “eco-development,” regional economic development based on sustainable use of physical, biological, and cultural resources, as an attempt to fuse conservation and development. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987: 9) points out that “sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs.” This has led to criticism that sustainable development is more of a strategy for “sustaining development” rather than supporting natural and human life.

During this period sustainability came to be accepted as a mediating term that bridged the gap between developers and environmentalists (O’Riordan 1988). Traditionally, in their quest for economic improvement, developers paid little attention to the environmental consequences of their projects. As a crucial element of economic development and stability, sustainable agriculture is a derivative and subset of sustainable development. The United Nations’ Agenda 21, adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992, promoted sustainable agriculture and rural development as a plan for meeting food needs without further degrading natural resources. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development continued on the path of raising awareness of connections between poverty and resource degradation.

**The Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the United States**

In America, the New Deal farm policies of the 1930s made some overtures toward the importance of soil conservation, although they were developed primarily as supply management programs. Despite early recognition of problems of soil erosion and pesticide contamination, American agriculture increasingly adopted input-intensive production regimes, driven in part by government subsidies. Then, during the energy crisis of the 1970s, the price of petroleum-based farm inputs (fuel, pesticides, and fertilizers) rose with the price of oil. Consequently, as people began to question the energy intensification of industrialized agriculture and reconsider the deleterious effects of increasing pesticide use, the contemporary concept of agricultural sustainability first emerged (Buttel et al. 1990).

Interest in and activities around sustainable agriculture grew in the early 1980s, fueled by concerns about resource depletion (such as groundwater overdrafts and soil erosion and salinization), environmental contamination (such as nitrates in groundwater), water quality damage through sedimentation, direct and indirect pesticide poisoning, wildlife habitat loss, and the diminishing increase in marginal yields in response to additional inputs such as fertilizers. These issues contributed to a growing sense that modern agricultural production could not be sustained indefinitely. A number of influential writings on the need for a more sustainable agricultural system were published. For instance, Wes Jackson’s *New Roots for Agriculture* introduced many people to the idea that agricultural production could be modified to work with rather than against the environment (Jackson 1980).

And despite increasing criticism of the USDA’s contributions to agricultural problems, ironically it was a USDA report that provided a spark to the incipient sustainable agriculture movement. This 1980s publication, *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming*, provided evidence of the existence and efficacy of organic farming enterprises in the United States.

Following in the pioneering organic farming and gardening tradition of his father, J. I. Rodale, Robert Rodale expanded the concept and brought it to a larger audience with articles such as “Breaking New Ground: The Search for a Sustainable Agriculture” (Rodale 1983). Various concepts such as organic farming (based on specific agricultural practices), biodynamic agriculture (based on philosophy), and agroecology (based on environmental science) emerged in the ensuing discussions (Dahlgberg 1991). This agricultural movement is referred to by several different names, depending upon the period in which people wrote about it and the aspects they chose to emphasize. Prominent among these names are “low-input agriculture,” “ecological agriculture,” and “organic farming.” The term “sustainable agriculture” has emerged as the most prevalent, in part because it has been accepted by national and international agricultural agencies.

Another aspect of the agricultural sustainability movement was economic. The farm financial crises of the late 1980s, precipitated by an overexpansion
of production, increased interest among farmers and government agencies in finding alternatives to more conventional agricultural practices. To meet expanding global demand during the 1970s, American farmers increased production financed largely by credit. Then 1981 brought record high interest rates and low commodity prices caused by bumper crops. Although U.S. farm production was at its highest level in history, 1982 was the worst year for farm income since 1932. The 1984 global recession led to a further decrease in demand and therefore prices, leading to record expenditures on U.S. government farm programs. In 1983 USDA expenditures amounted to 413 percent of net farm income. At this time, American farmers' largest production expense was interest payment on farm loans (Wilkening and Gilbert 1987). When demand fell, farmers saw not only their markets dry up, but the value of their land decline. As a result they could not make their loan payments. Farm bankruptcies were at their highest level since the Depression. Publicity about farmers losing farms that had been in their family for generations, along with stories of farmer suicides, tugged at the heartstrings of both rural and urban Americans. With his publication of *The Unsettling of America* in 1988, Wendell Berry persuasively argued that agriculture was as much about human culture and values as it was about producing food (Berry 1988). This book, along with the farm crisis, led to the general public’s embracing the ideal of the small family farm. A government report framed sustainable agriculture as the fourth major era in agriculture (following the horsepower, mechanical, and chemical eras), stating that the effects of this new era could be more profound than those of previous agricultural revolutions (GAO 1992b).

**Comparing Sustainable Agriculture and Conventional Agricultural Approaches**

Several studies have examined how sustainable (or alternative) agriculture differs from the conventional agrifood paradigm. Beus and Dunlap (1990), for example, compared the writings of six influential proponents of alternative agriculture with six leading proponents of conventional agriculture in order to clarify core beliefs and values embodied within each perspective (Table 1). Through this review, six major distinctions between alternative and conventional agriculture emerged: centralization vs. decentralization, dependence vs. independence, competition vs. community, domination of nature vs. harmony with nature, specialization vs. diversity, and exploitation vs. restraint. With regard to the first three distinctions, the perspectives of alternative agriculture closely parallel those of earlier agrarian movements, which traditionally resisted unbridled growth in agriculture, advocated decentralized production and marketing, and affirmed farming as a meaningful and virtuous way of life. Today’s alternative agriculturalists, however, are much more concerned with the environmental aspects of agriculture than their agrarian populist predecessors were.

This interest in the environment is a primary difference between alternative and conventional agriculture. Alternative agriculture emphasizes cooperation with nature while conventional agriculture has treated nature as something to overcome. Similarly, while alternative agriculturalists see on-farm diversity (of crops and livestock) as a linchpin of sustainable practice, conventional agriculturalists see specialization and monoculture as essential to efficiency and productivity. On the subject of resources, alternative agriculturalists condemn current practices (e.g., soil erosion and groundwater depletion) as borrowing from the future, while conventional agriculturalists believe that only by harnessing resources with advanced technology will we be able to feed the world and enjoy the affluence achieved through increased agricultural production.

Dahlberg (1991) also contrasts conventional and alternative agriculture, claiming that the debate represents both different perspectives on the future direction of agriculture and a clash between different worldviews (Table 2). In his discussion, a tension exists between institutions, such as government agencies and international bodies, and the advocates of alternative agriculture. For conventional agriculture, the measure of success is high productivity and profits. Alternative agricultural groups, in contrast, privilege small-scale production units, healthy communities, and social equity. Another key difference between conventional and alternative agriculture is one of different planning horizons. While alternative agriculturalists take the long view, conventional agriculturalists often use short time frames that correspond to federal policymaking cycles of only a few years duration. In general, conventional agriculture’s approach to agricultural policy typically reflects satisfaction with or acquiescence to current policy, such as commodity subsidies and tax laws (although some conventional agriculturalists advocate a more neoliberal trade regime without subsidies). Alternative agriculture, on the other hand, is by definition interested in reforming the agricultural policies that contribute to unsustainable practices. For Dahlberg, while conventional agriculturalists are not averse to using less

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4. Pfeffer (1992) points out the similarities of the farm financial crisis of the 1870s and the 1980s. Both had to do with expansion of production financed by loans and the subsequent collapse of the market for agricultural products.
Table 1: Key elements of competing agricultural paradigms according to Beus and Dunlap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional agriculture</th>
<th>Alternative agriculture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centralization</td>
<td>Decentralization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/international production, processing, and marketing</td>
<td>More local/regional production, processing, and marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated population; fewer farmers</td>
<td>Dispersed populations; more farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated control of land, resources, and capital</td>
<td>Dispersed control of land, resources, and capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large, capital-intensive production units and technology</td>
<td>Small, low-capital production units and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy reliance on external sources of energy, inputs, and credit</td>
<td>Reduced reliance on external sources of energy, inputs, and credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism and dependence on the market</td>
<td>More personal and community self-sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary emphasis on science, specialists, and experts</td>
<td>Primary emphasis on personal knowledge, skills, and local wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cooperation; self-interest</td>
<td>Increased cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm traditions and rural culture out-dated</td>
<td>Preservation of farm traditions and rural culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small rural communities not necessary to agriculture</td>
<td>Small rural communities essential to agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm work a drudgery; labor an input to be minimized</td>
<td>Farm work rewarding; labor an essential to be made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming is a business only</td>
<td>Farming is a way of life as a business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary emphasis on speed, quantity, and profit</td>
<td>Primary emphasis on permanence, quality, and beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domination of nature</td>
<td>Harmony with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans are separate from and superior to nature</td>
<td>Humans are part of and subject to nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature consists primarily of resources to be used</td>
<td>Nature is valued primary for its own sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life cycle incomplete; decay (recycling wastes) neglected</td>
<td>Life cycle complete; growth and decay balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human-made systems imposed on nature</td>
<td>Natural ecosystems are imitated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production maintained by agricultural chemicals</td>
<td>Production maintained by development of healthy soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly processed, nutrient- fortified food</td>
<td>Minimally processed, naturally nutritious food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialization</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow genetic base</td>
<td>Broad genetic base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most plants grown in monocultures</td>
<td>More plants grown in polycultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-cropping in succession</td>
<td>Multiple crops in complementary rotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of crops and livestock</td>
<td>Integration of crops and livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized production systems</td>
<td>Locally adapted production systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly specialized, reductionist science and technology</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary, systems-oriented science and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>Restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External costs often ignored</td>
<td>All external costs must be considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term benefits outweigh long-term consequences</td>
<td>Short-term and long-term outcomes equally important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on heavy use of nonrenewable resources</td>
<td>Based on renewable resources; nonrenewable resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great confidence in science and technology</td>
<td>Limited confidence in science and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High consumption to maintain economic growth</td>
<td>Consumption restrained to benefit future generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial success; busy lifestyle; materialism</td>
<td>Self-discovery; simpler lifestyle; nonmaterialism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Environmentally damaging inputs, they subscribe to the idea that people must dominate nature in order to achieve prosperity. Alternative agriculturalists seek a mutually beneficial relationship with nature, believing that human and environmental well-being are interdependent.

While the proponents of both conventional and alternative agriculture embrace some aspects of science and technology, their fundamental approaches are different. What distinguishes the two approaches within a scientific framework is that conventional agriculture tends to be reductionist and single-discipline oriented, while alternative agriculture emphasizes interdisciplinary, whole-farm systems, and often localized research approaches. Since science and technological approaches have been responsible for the introduction of some unsustainable practices, however, another segment of the alternative agriculture movement is much more circumspect about the role science and technology can play in developing sustainability. Some in this group believe that scientific research must include broader social and ethical criteria; they typically call for a basic restructuring of the agricultural research and extension systems. Others go even further, questioning the relevance of science and technology and citing the inability of the agricultural sciences to resolve fundamental problems in the social and legal systems that led to unsustainable agriculture in the first place. Dahlberg points out other differences within the alternative agriculture movement itself. For example, one wing of the alternative agriculture movement seeks more basic political changes, such as restructuring land tenure arrangements, while others are content to work toward changes in farming practices. These differences are backgrounded, however, by the extent of agreement on issues within the sustainable agriculture movement in the United States.

The Organizations of the Sustainable Agriculture Movement

Farmers, consumers, development planners, university researchers and educators, policymakers, and environmentalists are all engaged in the sustainable agriculture movement. Organizations active in sustainable agriculture include grower groups such as the California Certified Organic Farmers, the New England Organic Farmers Association, and the Biodynamic Agriculture Association. Increasingly, traditional farmer organizations such as the National Farmers Union show interest in the methods and policies of sustainable agriculture. Established environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Environmental Defense Fund have been active in the analysis and development of sustainable agriculture. Private, nonprofit organizations such as the Land
Table 2 Comparison of conventional and alternative agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional agriculture</th>
<th>Alternative agriculture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Future decades and centuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Approach</strong></td>
<td>Policy changes focused on reorganization within institutions, e.g., reform of agricultural subsidies and tax laws. (Policy changes focused on basic reform, e.g., land tenure and terms of trade)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to Science and Technology</strong></td>
<td>Faith that current scientific and technological approaches can produce sustainable outcomes (Science and technology can have a positive role only if significantly restructured within a broadened ethical and social framework) Interdisciplinary, systems-based, and localized approaches (Need to examine fundamental discontinuities between social and legal systems and natural systems) Requires fundamental restructuring of current specialization of top-down research, education, and extension services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals of Sustainability</strong></td>
<td>Better integration of individuals, communities, and nature through socially just and regenerative system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measures of Success</strong></td>
<td>System health criteria include economics, ecology, ethics, and equity. Health of agriculture depends on diverse, healthy rural landscapes and communities, which in turn depend on healthy agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visions of the Future</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of humankind's dependence on natural systems</td>
<td>Need for smaller-scale social and technological systems built around healthy local communities and agroecosystems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from Dahlberg 1991.

Institute in Kansas, the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska, the Institute for Alternative Agriculture in Maryland, the Committee for Sustainable Agriculture in California, the Rodale Research Institute in Pennsylvania, and the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C., devote programs to pursuing a sustainable agriculture. Citizen groups such as Mothers and Others Against Pesticides and the Humane Society focus on specific issues within the overall sustainability theme. In California there is even a group of public and private grantmakers, the Funders Agriculture Working Group, whose mission is to promote a sustainable agriculture and food system in the state. While the 1996 directory of American organizations in the sustainable agriculture movement lists profiles of over seven hundred groups (Sustainable Agriculture Network 1996), there is one umbrella organization in the United States.

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture is a nonprofit organization created in 1994 to coordinate unified action within the sustainable agriculture movement. The organization is “dedicated to educating the public on the importance of a sustainable food and agriculture system that is economically viable, environmentally sound, socially just, and humane.” Focused primarily on federal policy, the Campaign works with regional organizations to analyze policy problems and solutions, increase public participation in the areas of concern to sustainable agriculture, and educate the general public about how agriculture is affected by federal policy. Funded mostly by foundations, the National Campaign is a networking organization whose members include family farmers, environmentalists, consumers, and social and economic justice advocates. It holds an annual meeting that includes educational workshops, alliance-building sessions, and short- and long-term planning sessions. The 2002 meeting included 135 people representing 101 organizations. The campaign publishes a quarterly newsletter, Ag Matters, and sends frequent policy advisories through the “Action Alert” e-mail list. The National Campaign works closely with one state and four regional Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups: California, Northeast, Midwest, Southern, and Western.

The California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (Calsagw), also founded in 1994, is a coalition of California organizations dedicated to building and strengthening the state’s movement for a sustainable and socially just food system. Calsagw provides a forum for information exchange and collaborative action and advocacy. It became incorporated as a nonprofit membership organization in July 2002. Prior to that it had been a project of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. It now has thirty-five member organizations, including ones that represent farming, farm labor, environment, and public health.
Community Food Security

The movement for community food security is the most recent iteration in approaches to solving food security problems that have existed for millennia. Community food security builds on concepts of previous food security efforts while offering alternatives to what those in the movement see as partial or short-term efforts to solve food security problems. In this section I summarize the history of the concept of food security, discuss the rise of the community food security movement, and describe the development of community food security movement organizations.

Concepts of Food Security

The concept of community food security is of more recent origin than that of sustainable agriculture. As with sustainability, however, concerns about achieving food security are not at all new. While food security issues of one form or another have been with us since the beginning of time, contemporary approaches to food security emerged during the world food crisis of the early 1970s. In 1974 the United Nations convened the World Food Conference in response to unprecedented increases in world prices of staple foods. The issue of food security was the dominant theme of the conference, and food security became a clear and central policy goal of most developing countries (Chisholm and Tyers 1982). While initially food security was usually defined at the national or global scale, it soon became clear that these types of aggregate measures missed conditions of food insecurity within households, communities, and regions and that these arenas needed to be addressed as well.

In the United States, where food insecurity has been a persistent, if less severe, problem than in impoverished countries, concepts of hunger and malnutrition were medicalized prior to the 1980s. Hunger was defined in clinical terms in order to facilitate measurement techniques that would “presumably provide the hard evidence from which to draw conclusions about the incidence of hunger” (Eisinger 1996: 218). During the 1980s, however, it became clear that, for policy purposes, it was more important to define conditions that lead to hunger, since by the time clinical effects of hunger become apparent, the damage may be irreversible (Neuhauser et al. 1995). Food security became the new discourse, defined by the USDA (1998a:11) as a condition in which “all people at all times have access to enough food for a healthy, active life. At a minimum, food security includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (for example, without resorting to use of emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, and other coping strategies).” Food insecurity is measured by a combination of factors. These include incidence of food acquisition through “abnormal” channels, (e.g., emergency food programs or borrowing from friends); limitations on the variety and quantity of available food; worries about obtaining sufficient food supplies and the money to buy them; and a poor-quality diet (Eisinger 1996).

The amount of political attention paid to hunger in the United States has gone through cycles of official concern and indifference. It was not until the Depression that federal food assistance programs were developed in an attempt to reconcile the paradox of the simultaneous existence of agricultural surpluses and hunger (Poppendieck 1995). These early programs focused primarily on the disposal of agricultural surpluses. Contemporary efforts to end domestic hunger began in the late 1960s when hunger was “discovered” in America in the Mississippi Delta by Senators Robert F. Kennedy and Joseph Clark following President Johnson’s 1964 declaration of a war on poverty. At this time, social programs were instituted to more directly combat hunger (Fitchen 1997). These programs included food stamps, school lunches, and supplemental food for women, infants, and children (WIC). Even with the emphasis on feeding the hungry, agricultural interests continued to hold sway in the development of the programs. For example, the USDA food stamp program was originally developed largely through the self-interested, rent-seeking behavior of economic agents in the food industry rather than social welfare (DeLorme et al. 1992). Nonetheless, these programs made significant improvements in food security for low-income people.

Eventually, however, the slowdown of the postwar economic boom, the breakdown of the political contract between capital and labor, and the increasing influence of conservative elements in government resulted in a new food security crisis. In the 1980s many people’s economic conditions worsened; low-income people lost the ground they had gained, and many middle-class families joined the ranks of the newly poor. Children were far from immune to these trends. Between 1989 and 1993 there was a 26 percent increase in the number of children living in families with incomes below 75 percent of the poverty line (Food Research and Action Center 1993). Despite these conditions it was during this time that policymakers began cutting safety-net food programs and the farm surplus–food stamp
coalition began to disintegrate. At this point, the emphasis shifted away from government assistance and toward private-sector emergency-food programs to accommodate increasing food needs. The Medford Declaration of 1991, produced by leaders in the antihunger movement, called for voluntary, community-based efforts to provide food as a supplement to public food-assistance programs aimed at achieving food security (Poppendieck 1997). Recognizing the insufficiency of efforts to combat the scope of deteriorations in food security, activists began developing a more articulated community approach to food security.

Development of Community Food Security

In many ways the origins of the contemporary community food security movement can be traced to the uprising in Los Angeles following the Rodney King verdict in 1992. One of the vulnerabilities exposed through the uprising was that of food access and quality in low-income communities. This prompted a group of environmental justice students from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), led by Robert Gottlieb, to undertake a research project on the core issues facing the ethnically diverse and limited-resource community of South Central Los Angeles. The research project resulted in the publication of Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City in 1993. The needs assessment found that the most pressing concern of people in the community was food—access, quality, and price.

Bolstered by these findings, and building on the long-standing efforts of people working on food issues in local communities, a small group of people decided that it was time to come together to look at food security problems and efforts in a more comprehensive way. In 1994 Bob Gottlieb (then a professor at UCLA), Mark Winne (executive director of the Hartford Food System), and Andy Fisher (then a graduate student at UCLA) convened a group of thirty organizations and individuals in Chicago to discuss new approaches to food security. A key impetus for holding the meeting at this time was the possibility of influencing the upcoming farm bill legislation, which authorizes programs and funding for food and agricultural

5. In April 1992 four European-American Los Angeles police Department officers were acquitted of charges of committing assault in the process of arresting African-American motorist Rodney King. Hours after the verdict was announced an urban civil disturbance was in full swing in the city.
holds that CFS is systems-oriented and that it include a wide range of disciplines and value collaborations among multiple and diverse organizations.

Comparing Community Food Security and Traditional Anti-hunger Approaches

The community food security movement arose out of a desire for more comprehensive approaches to food security. Community food security is simultaneously a goal, an analytical framework, a dynamic concept and strategy for movement building, and a tool for innovative policy development (Gottlieb and Joseph 1997). At the same time, it embodies a critique of traditional anti-hunger programs. The differences between traditional anti-hunger and community food security approaches have been summarized by Winne, Joseph, and Fisher (1997), key founders of the community food security movement (Table 3). As opposed to the concept of hunger, which measures an existing condition and is defined in terms of an individual’s food insecurity, community food security has come to represent a community-based and prevention-oriented framework. “It seeks to evaluate the existence of resources, both community and personal . . . to provide an individual with adequate, acceptable food” (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996b: 196). While traditional food programs are based on the idea of food entitlements or charity, community food security emphasizes food self-reliance. For the community food security movement, traditional programs such as food stamps and food banks are seen as stopgap measures that fail to address the need for long-term solutions to food security.

Community food security works to build a community-based food system grounded in regional agriculture and local decision making. While the federal government defined food security as “a condition in which all people have access at all times to nutritionally adequate food through normal channels” (House 1989), the community food security movement has an added emphasis on local sources of food. In its definition of food security, the movement substitutes the words “local, non-emergency sources” for “normal channels” to specify acceptable food sources. In contrast, the anti-hunger movement generally has not focused on how or where food is produced (Winne et al. 1997), and has not viewed as problematic the fact that most major food program decisions are made at the federal rather than local level. Community food security activists are also concerned about the nutritional quality of people’s food. Food banks and government commodity programs distribute the surplus from the regular food system, not necessarily food that contributes to a balanced and healthy diet.

### Table 3 Comparison of Anti-hunger and Community Food Security Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anti-hunger</th>
<th>Community Food Security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Treatment; social welfare</td>
<td>community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of Analysis</td>
<td>Individual/household</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>Shorter-term</td>
<td>Longer-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Social equity</td>
<td>Individual empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduit System</td>
<td>Emergency food, federal food programs</td>
<td>Marketplace, self-production, local/regional food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services</td>
<td>Community organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Commodities; cheap food prices</td>
<td>Support local agriculture; Fair prices for farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Sustain food resources</td>
<td>Community planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Winne et al. 1997.

Organizations in the Community Food Security Movement

After the Chicago meeting in 1994, a loose coalition of organizations continued to work on farm-bill legislation in an attempt to integrate ideas and practices of community food security. Out of this effort grew the national Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), established in February 1996 (and incorporated in 1997). The CFSC is a nonprofit North American organization working to build sustainable and regional food systems and improve access to nutritious food. As a coalition it consists of groups centered around social and environmental justice, nutrition, environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, community development, labor relations, and antipoverty and anti-hunger efforts. The CFSC has a committee structure for addressing issues of concern to its members.

The CFSC has developed quickly. By 1998, the organization had grown to more than four hundred members and a mailing list of over four thousand for its newsletter, Community Food Security News. Hundreds of projects and conferences have been initiated since 1997. Rapid growth has continued. In 2002 the organization had close to 700 members (265 of
which are organizations) and a mailing list of 6,500, with members located throughout forty-one states and the District of Columbia. Its staff has grown from one and a half in 2001 to eleven in 2002 (Fisher 2002a). While the number of participants at annual conferences had been averaging around 300, nearly 600 people participated in its sixth annual CFSC conference in October of 2002.

The CFSC focuses on three primary areas of work: (1) training and technical assistance (e.g., conferences, workshops, community food assessments); (2) project work (e.g., farm-to-school programs); and (3) policy advocacy and organizing at local, state, and federal levels. In addition, the CFSC publishes a quarterly newsletter, policy papers, research reports, and guidebooks; issues policy updates; and maintains a listserv that facilitates information sharing and networking among 500 subscribers. Coalition staff organize about sixty workshops and give about thirty presentations on community food security each year.

After a year of planning and organizing, the California Community Food Security Network was launched in June 2002 at a statewide meeting, “California Community Food Security Summit: Organizing for Action,” attended by two hundred members of the California community food security movement. The purpose of the meeting was to take the “first step toward building the cohesion necessary to take the movement to the next stage.” It built upon five listening sessions that were held throughout the state to learn more about the food and agriculture issues and priorities of people in diverse communities. While focused on community food security, the conference was sponsored not only by the CFSC but also by thirteen other groups, including food banks, anti-hunger organizations, environmental groups, sustainable agriculture organizations, and the University of California. Out of the meeting grew the California Community Food Security Network, a consortium that includes organizations representing environmental, nutrition, hunger, farmer, labor, and public health issues. The goal of the network is universal access to healthy food, which is to be achieved through means of education, organizing, and advocacy. Issues addressed include hunger, diet-related health problems such as diabetes and obesity, lack of access to fresh produce, and the loss of family farms. The network intends to develop a coordinated policy platform and improve cooperation among state and local organizations in order to further progress toward community food security.

Both the problems in the agrifood system and the social movements meant to ameliorate them have had a continuing presence in this country.