

Chapter 9

Place-Based Food Commoning

Principle: We know our place as the ground of our being and relationships within the Earth Interbeing. *The wholeness of the Earth Interbeing emerges in specific ways in specific places. Every place has great significance as it embodies the sacred Earth Interbeing.*

All life needs a place to be, grow, and live. In our place, we encounter all the elements of creation and have relationships with the other beings with whom we interact and share our place of interbeing. Just as the whole has qualities greater than its parts, the whole community of place has qualities greater than individual beings or species.



Western people have a geographic sense of place, an area we can point to on a map. Yet, place transcends territory. It has no set boundaries other than what our hearts encompass. Place provides the dimension for interbeing to orient itself over time through directly experienced relationships with each other and the landscape, soils, water, air, and weather. From the vantage point of place, we construct our worldview and knowledge. Without a place, we cannot be.

Only within our place can we know our wholeness and actively care for the Earth Interbeing. The totality of the Earth Interbeing emerges in specific ways in specific locations. Each place embodies the whole Earth Interbeing. By caring for our place, we care for the whole Earth Interbeing. Places shape the community of beings, and we shape our place.

In our place, we encounter and interact every day with the wholeness of Earth Interbeing. We naturally want to know more about how wholeness manifests itself within our experiences of place. Without this knowledge of place, we ignore our responsibilities of reciprocity and duties of care that ground our relationships with other people, other beings, and the community. We approach our place with awe, respect, and great care, protecting our place and restoring what we have desecrated.

Caring for Place

The Earth sustains all its places. We interbeing care for what sustains us to ensure our place's ongoing well-being and capacities to provide us sustenance across generations. We preserve individual, community, and interbeing harmony in the ever-changing balance of our place. We do not control our shared place and its life: we communally interbe. Because we eat what grows within our place, we want to live sustainably in it.

Western culture has separated us from interbeing and the Earth, which means we do not know our place. From a position of separation, we ignorantly impose our will upon Earth and life and ignore the consequences of our actions. We blind ourselves to the Earth Interbeing's constant flow of energy and transformations, within which life harmonizes with each other and the Earth through reciprocity.

Commoning Food in Place

A balanced interbeing foodway meets all life's mutual growing and food needs. The interbeing grounds its foodways with plants transforming the sun's energy into sugars for life energy. Then, along comes

the plant-eaters, who eat that energy, followed by predators. The remains of the plants' captured energy get circled back to the plants by the detritivores, the multitude of beings who break down dead and decaying life into nutrients for new plants to grow.

The interbeing foodway models for people how to manage and govern a place-based food commons, which nests within the interbeing foodway. The commons integrate the cultural, social, health, and political dimensions of our lives within the interbeing ecology of place. In this approach, we know the world as abundant yet limited. We know that beings adapt to their place and change it to meet their needs. Within a place-based food commons, people learn to negotiate our differing needs that arise in particular situations with other beings. The commons ensures a place for food to grow for all beings and the recovery of the balance of the interbeing food way that people have greatly disturbed.

Local Food

We generally understand that a local food system focuses on feeding people. Within a place-based food commons, people learn that their needs and wants do not take priority over other beings. We recognize the mutual neediness of all life and our interbeing responsibilities to provide mutual aid and protect the habitat of other beings so that all life has access to the food it needs. Even with this fundamental difference, a place-based food commons shares many advantages of a local food system.

A local food system includes home and urban gardeners, small growers who market directly to consumers, and farmers who provision a larger foodshed. The movement to eat locally values quality food for people and largely supports caring for the Earth and biodiversity, sustainable production, justice for the hungry, and land access for marginalized growers.

A local network of growers, consumers, markets, and advocates has already started transforming local food systems. More people now share the responsibility for the ecological sustainability of a local food economy and view access to healthy food and the land to grow it as a right. While the global system has reduced its production methods to just one solution, a local food system has as many approaches to food production and distribution as we have small growers.



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Length of the food chain: Within a local food system, we eat food that growers have produced within a short distance of where we live, often translated into food miles. The USDA defines local food as food grown within 400 miles of the consumers who eat it. The corporate food system has weaponized this narrow institutional understanding of local foods by portraying local food systems as unrealistic and naïve compared to the robust corporate food system that grows cheap food on a global industrial scale and delivers the food people want when they want it.

Focusing on food miles needs to include the values and urgency of returning to local food production and consumption. The global corporate food system has very long food chains. Nearly every link of this food chain involves replacing ecological processes with artificial ones: fertilizer for manure, using land

as a substrate rather than a living soil, high-tech machines, irrigation, genetically modified seeds, industrially farmed animals, herbicides, pesticides, plastic, ultraprocessed foods, financing, trade, retailing, to name a few. We must recognize what happens to the waste and environmental impacts each chain link generates. Every input has its own very long value chain that crosses continents and oceans multiple times to get food into our mouths. The complexity of the corporation only increases.

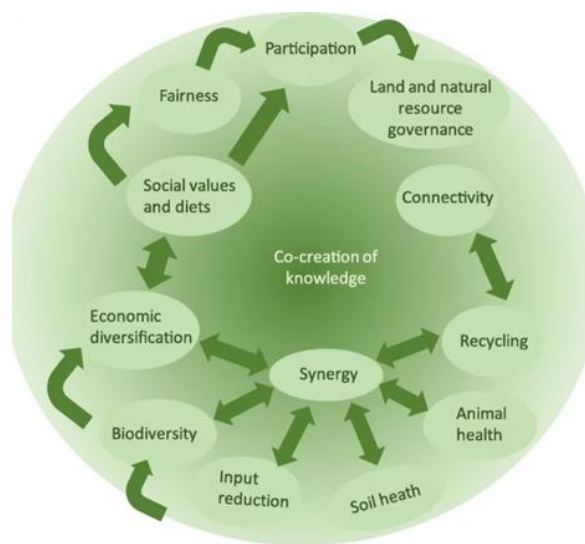
Shorter supply chains have more resiliency and resource efficiency, as demonstrated by directly marketing through farmers markets and CSAs. Local growers market what they grow, eliminating the long line of intermediaries of the global system. Local foodways reduce many inefficiencies of the global food system: food waste, overuse of plastics, energy costs, wages, and social inequities. We all experienced empty grocery shelves during COVID-19, caused by the lack of resiliency of long supply chains to unexpected shocks. Gardening and local production had the resiliency to feed many people through the crisis.

Agroecology: A growing number of small local farmers use agroecological production practices, applying ecological concepts and principles in farming. Growers minimize inputs and waste by working with natural processes rather than replacing them with artificial ones. They regenerate the soil rather than destroy it. These sustainable ways of food production interact in balance and harmony with the food ways of other species within a shared place, producing a more equitable and sustainable place interbeing food economy.

Re-connecting urban to rural: Historically, cities have subordinated surrounding rural farms and communities to meet their unquenchable thirst for more land to house growing populations and industrial development. But when urban people depend upon their place's rural areas for food, all care for the Earth Interbeing. We have a different sense of responsibility for our place.

We begin to listen to our place and learn to live within its limits and possibilities. Knowing our place becomes essential to us, and we have a growing curiosity about the other beings who share our place with us, about how we interact and interrelate with each other and the sun, Earth, water, land, and weather. We come to know our embeddedness within our place interbeing as we start living its lifeways.

The reconnection of consumers with rural and urban growers unleashes the transformative potential of place. Restoring community food production strengthens rural-urban relationships as we see a continuum of growers, from gardeners to small farms. Embedding our foodways within the community of interbeing imparts a deeper meaning to the relationships we have within our place.



Principles of Agroecology (Wezel, 2020)

Local food systems recover values that the global corporate food system ignores with its singular focus on maximizing the profit of its food from nowhere. Local growers meet the needs for healthy food and foods that reflect the culture of a place. Consumers respect and support the growers for the food they produce; growers respect and share the values of those who eat their food and sustain their livelihood. Meeting social, justice, ecological, cultural, and historic foodways strengthen a community by deepening its diversity and commonality.

Local decision-making: Within a place's foodways, we establish trust relationships between growers and consumers because of the face-to-face interactions between growers and eaters. By learning how to work together, growers and consumers can sideline the untrustworthy and those who put self-benefit above honesty, trust, and other community values.

People are most motivated to care for where they live: ecologies are local. A place has no set boundaries, yet it has limits. A food commons may start and stay as a neighborhood solution or scale up to provide a larger foodshed. The sense of community engagement, trust, and integrity of a participatory democratic process limits the scale of a place-based food commons. Place-based food commons foster a vision and practice of governing by cooperation, sharing, stewardship, sustainability, mutual aid, and direct democracy. Food commons may find it wiser to encourage the start-up of a new food commons to meet a growing need than to increase their scale and endanger their capacities to function as a commons.

We have no power within the global corporate food system as the control over its food has passed to those who have the power to act at the extreme distances of a global system. Distant government involvement within place-based commoned foodways would entangle the commons in the power of special interests that now control government. Further, distant bureaucracies do not have the capacities to manage the ecological details of a particular place as they approach problem-solving with a one-size-fits-all approach.

Decentralized local control of foodways has the greatest potential to reflect the values of those seeking place-based foodways. Whenever food commoning efforts lose their sense of place and awareness of the effects of what they do upon the well-being of the Earth Interbeing in pursuit of human-centered goals, their transformative potential dwindles.

Repossession: All places on the Western Hemisphere hold horrific legacies of dispossession and enslavement. The Atlantic-facing European monarchies and their American colonies forced the removal of Indigenous people from the places they inhabited. Then they claimed ownership of the land, its waters, and resources. Europeans and later Americans enslaved Africans to extract wealth from the land. Whites claimed racial superiority to justify their heinous crimes. The white people who now live in these places may acknowledge their theft of land and labor, but our deep beliefs in our superiority and our willingness to harm others for self-benefit have not changed. We have distorted views of land and ownership. Any movement of white people toward commoning an Earth Interbeing foodway has to begin with unraveling our collaboration with the ongoing violence against people of color, other marginalized people, and more than human beings. We must move our focus from what benefits us to the recovery of the wholeness of the Earth Interbeing. We must stop harming and start healing the Earth, and all life. This long and challenging process can begin with place-based food commoning.

Resources

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