Race, privilege and the exclusivity of farm internships: Ecological agricultural education and the implications for food movements

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Abstract

Internships have become a prominent way of training new ecological farmers across North America. This paper interrogates the social identities of these interns asking: Who is being trained as the next generation of ecological farmers and what are the implications for food movements more broadly? Our research reveals a series of privileges associated with the ability to work for little or no remuneration and to access rural spaces where most internships are located. We argue that, while providing valuable knowledge and skills, the dominant model of ecological farm internships privileges white, middle-class young people and creates barriers to entry for racialized people, thereby limiting access to the subsequent education, training and other privileges awarded as part of the experience. In addition, this model hinders opportunities for building a more diverse ecological farming sector by reproducing a particular kind of farmer, limiting the impact of food movements.

Keywords

Agricultural education, ecological farming, food movements, internships, racialization

Ecological approaches to farming have been welcomed as an alternative to industrial modes of food production and are widely recognized as fundamental to building healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems

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(IPES), 2016; Rosset and Altieri, 2017). In the global north, many new entrants interested in learning ecological production methods come from urban and sub-urban non-agricultural backgrounds and on-farm internships have been lauded as a way to provide the necessary education through sharing farmers' knowledge and experience (Ekers and Levkoe, 2016; Niewolny and Lillard, 2010). These internship arrangements are typically organized and managed at the individual farm level. While some informal associations exist to support internships, there are virtually no standards, regulations or oversight (Schreiner et al., 2018). Through these arrangements, interns are typically offered room and board along with hands-on knowledge and skills. They work long hours and provide an essential element of the farm's operations, in most cases, without a formal wage. While exact numbers have not been collected, evidence suggests that ecological farm internships are becoming increasingly prolific across North America (Ekers et al., 2016; Kalyuzhny, 2012).

There has been limited formal study of ecological farm internships; however, new research has questioned these pedagogical approaches by analysing the opportunities and challenges of these arrangements (Ekers et al., 2016; MacAuley and Niewolny, 2016; Mostafanezhad et al., 2015). Levkoe (2017) argues that ecological farm internships have the potential to strengthen the sector by providing valuable training for a new generation of farmers and educating sustainable food systems advocates. Despite these opportunities, this research also shows that farm operators are often dependent on interns as non-waged labourers to support low-profit margins which can result in problematic labour practices (also see Ekers et al., 2016). Further, the learning opportunities gained from ecological farm internships appear to have been embraced by a particular group of individuals that can afford to work without a wage. While research on this topic is increasing, it is the latter point regarding intern demographics that requires additional study and is the focus of this paper.

Based on a study in Ontario, Canada, this paper interrogates the social identities of interns by asking: Who is being trained as the next generation of ecological farmers and what are the implications for food movements more broadly? Our research reveals that there are a series of privileges associated with the ability to work for little or no remuneration and to access rural spaces where most ecological farm internships are located. We argue that, while providing valuable hands-on learning for new farmers, the dominant model of ecological farm internship privileges white, middle-class young people and creates barriers to entry for racialized people limiting access to the subsequent education, training and other privileges that are awarded as part of the experience. Further, the dominant internship model hinders opportunities for building a more diverse ecological farming sector by promoting a particular type of education and reproducing a particular kind of farmer, further limiting the diversity and impact of alternative food movements. Ignoring the intersectional inequalities being reproduced within these movements limits the ability to meet the goals of building healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems for all.

In the first section, we frame our arguments surrounding the problematic nature of new farmer education in relation to the exclusionary nature of ecological farm internships. We begin by exploring the subject of internships, exploitation and race in the scholarly literature followed by issues of race and farming. We then turn to our research findings from a series of surveys and interviews with farmers and interns from rural and urban ecological farm internship experiences. We focus our analysis on three themes that emerged from the data: privilege and the stigma of (unpaid) farm work, rural environments and race, and possibilities of urban farm internships. Our discussion addresses the implications of the exclusivity of internships for the ecological farming sector and for the future of food movements. We conclude with a promising example of Black Creek Community Farm's (BCCF) urban ecological farm internship programme where social justice education is a core

part of the mandate. This integration of agricultural training with food justice is related to what Meek et al. (2019) describe as ‘educational sovereignty’, an approach used to build and enhance food movements. Re-imagined as part of a critical food systems education (Meek and Tarlau, 2015), ecological farm internships have the potential to train new farmers while also transforming food systems.

Internships, exploitation and race

One of the defining trends within capitalist economies is the growth of casual and informal work. Critics argue that through the demise of regulated and stable jobs associated with the post-war years, we are now witnessing a far less regulated employment sector and work that is often more flexible and uncertain (Theodore and Peck, 2002; Vosco, 2006). The emergence of internships as a form of educational training, paid and un-paid, is reflective of this trend and is occurring at a time marked by increasing joblessness and precarious employment (Gedye et al., 2004; Geobey, 2013). In the broadest sense, an internship can be described as a temporary work experience that is undertaken by individuals seeking hands-on professional experiences in a particular field. Beyond knowledge and skill training, interns can acquire insight into a new employment sector along while making valuable contacts that can be crucial to their future career (Blair, 2001). Most internships are organized informally directly by the employer, and there is very little regulation for how they function. For many professions, an internship can be a mandatory point of entry.

The laws on internships vary across jurisdictions. In Ontario, if someone performs work that is of benefit to another person or business, they are considered an employee entitled to a minimum wage along with protections under the Employment Standards Act (Government of Ontario, 2000). An exception to these rules is for ‘trainees’; however, in these cases internship positions must meet a set of restrictive conditions (see Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2016a). While some internships offer a salary or stipend, many are unpaid. There is little information available about the number of unpaid interns; however, it is estimated that over 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada violate employment standards every year (Langille, 2013). According to the Ontario Ministry of Labour, a 2016 blitz conducted by employment standards officers in the Greater Toronto Area found that of the 77 workplaces hosting interns, almost 25% did not meet legal requirements under the Employment Standards Act (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2016b). In the US, it is estimated that about 50% of all internships are unpaid or paid below minimum wage compared with about 40% in the United Kingdom (Perlin, 2012: 28). There have been increasing efforts to address the exploitation of young workers involved in unpaid internship programmes by tightening the legislation and enforcement (De Peuter et al., 2012; Webb, 2015).

Beyond legal concerns, the prevalence of unpaid internships raises a series of ethical questions involving the relationship between privilege and exploitation. To work without wages requires a considerable amount of social and economic capital but also raises questions over workplace justice as many non-wage workers perform the same tasks as their paid counterparts. Critics have asserted that, in most cases, an unpaid internship is a form of labour exploitation where an individual is engaged in work that should be done by paid staff. De Peuter et al. (2015) argue that with limited employment opportunities, an internship ‘naturalizes the performance of unpaid labour and diminishes workers’ expectations of employers’ (330). Beyond not having a wage, the lack of employment status excludes interns from a range of benefits along with certain health and safety protections. Ross Perlin’s (2012) seminal study of internships in the US, Canada and the UK demonstrates the ways that companies have used unregulated internships to exploit

young people's labour and to replace permanent, unionized positions with precarious workers. Many individuals completing internship programmes report that the education and training promised did not materialize and that they ended up doing unrelated and/or poor-quality work (Schwartz, 2013). Furthermore, interns are extremely limited in their recourse because they depend so heavily on positive references and the possibility of full-time employment.

While these concerns point to serious challenges, internships are structured by profound race and class inequalities that effect who can access them and reap the benefits (Leonard et al., 2016; Perlin, 2012). Internships tend to favour privileged individuals that have the social connections to obtain an internship in the first place, but also the support to work without a wage. In many cases, racialized and lower income people are unable to access the informal, and sometimes invisible social connections and networks that come from internships (Boulton, 2015; Swan, 2015). This reality points to the structural inequalities inherent in the internship model where 'institutional racism keeps people of colour out... In these and other ways we begin to see the internship system as a set of social mechanisms that differently include and exclude populations along intersecting lines of age, class, gender and race' (De Peuter et al., 2015: 331). Thus, the problem is not just that racialized and lower income individuals do not have access to internships, but that that internships serve to reproduce white privilege, predetermining the demographics of who will be the next generation of workers.

While internships are most prominent in media and cultural industries, they are prevalent across the private, public and non-profit sectors and increasingly are a way for perspective ecological farmers to learn their trade (Ekers et al., 2016; Terry, 2014). Ekers and Levkoe (2016) explain that there has been a shift in the demographic of new ecological farmers: 'As kinship labor has steadily declined over the last five decades, internships and volunteer positions have greatly expanded, to the point where there are currently several hundred ecological farms in the province of Ontario offering non-waged "farm experiences"' (180). Most of these interns come from urban, non-farming backgrounds with a keen interest to understand the theory and practice behind ecological farming as a business and career (Niewolny and Lillard, 2010). Beyond learning specific knowledge and skills, many interns are motivated by a desire to be part of movements for sustainable food systems (Levkoe, 2017; MacAuley and Niewolny, 2016; Ngo and Brklacich, 2014). However, it is also evident that many ecological farm businesses rely on interns as non-waged workers to meet seasonal and labour-intensive production needs (Ekers et al., 2016). From the limited research in this area, we know that the vast majority of ecological farm interns are white, under 30 years old and tend to be highly educated (Ekers et al., 2016; Levkoe, 2017; MacAuley and Niewolny, 2016; Weiler et al., 2016). This disproportionate demographic is part of a concerning pattern within the ecological agricultural sector that mirrors representation in mainstream food movements more broadly (Slocum, 2007).

The pedagogical presupposition of the ecological agriculture internship model relates closely to critiques of food systems education dominated by a social imaginary that privileges white, cultural histories, narratives and actions (Meek and Tarlau, 2015). For example, scholars have lamented that a wide range of actors in formal and informal education settings committed to developing more sustainable food systems tend to focus their attention on food knowledge instead of the structural problems thereby reproducing exclusionary racialized spaces (Guthman, 2008a; Slocum, 2007). Here, it is assumed that getting racialized people involved in community food projects is the solution to deep historical and structural inequalities. This approach, however, ignores the fact that these kinds of educational initiatives do not address economic exploitation, police brutality and

dismantling racism but instead involve individual and often apolitical solutions, reproducing privileged white subjectivities (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009).

Farming, food and race

While there is a wide range of literature celebrating the growth of ecological farming within food movements, there has been limited focus from both scholars and practitioners on the complexity of race and power in these sectors (Meek and Tarlau, 2015; Ramírez, 2015; Slocum, 2011, 2006). Discussing race in the context of food systems is not merely about addressing the contributions and concerns of racialized people but demands understanding that the history of food is deeply embedded in a history of colonialism, class, patriarchy and white supremacy. In other words, the structural injustices that are at the core of food systems are also reflected within the ideals and practices of food movements. This has been well documented by critical scholars that show how whiteness and power is reproduced in the leadership and practices of organizations with mandates to support healthy, just and sustainable food systems (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2007). Likewise, to understand race in relation to agricultural education demands acknowledging the history of slavery and colonialism along with the race and class discrimination as part of shaping and maintaining the dominant food system (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009; Green et al., 2011). While a detailed historical account of the food system is beyond the scope of this paper, in this section, we address the implications for the dominant models of ecological internships.

In the introduction to her book, *Race, Space and the Law*, Sherene Razack (2002) explains that whiteness in Canada is marked by transforming geographic spaces into racialized places where white bodies are seen as normal or beneficial while others become threats to that normality. Scholars have identified that white people can experience a range of benefits and privileges living and working in rural places (Pulido, 2000). This is partly reflected in the notion of an agrarian imaginary and the perceived entitlement to resettlement and a return to farming lifestyles. Alkon and McCullen (2011) describe the agrarian imaginary as a sentiment that ‘romanticizes and universalizes an agrarian narrative specific to whites while masking the contributions and struggles of people of color in food production’ (945). Others have argued that the agrarian imaginary has constructed farming environments as white spaces through associated history and values (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997). This ideal embraces a particular way of knowing and valuing land and farming that is embedded in whiteness. For instance, the desire to go ‘back to the land’ demonstrates the ability of white people to assume an idealized past that can be replicated without considering the ongoing consequences of the appropriation and exploitation of a particular territory and its inhabitants.

The narrative of idealizing an agrarian imaginary within food movements highlights the accessibility of rural spaces to white people thereby othering marginalized identities (Leitner, 2012). That white people’s experience benefits and privileges living in rural places (Pulido, 2000) demonstrates that history and space are tied together in ways that enable race to be (re)produced through space. In these rural environments, whiteness is positioned as central to belonging and cultural practices and attitudes towards racialized people reinforce the separation between whites and racialized people along with boundaries of the rural and urban. For instance, at farmer’s markets, white farmers are typically seen as the face of farming that feeds a population without further considering the farm workers that are most often migrants. Alkon and McCullen (2011) argue that such representation in our food system presents white farmers as stewards of the land, keepers of traditional knowledge

and the key element of farming communities. This normalizes the idea that ecological agriculture is the purview of white people.

For racialized people, desiring to engage in ecological agriculture can be complicated by the perception that rural spaces can be isolating, traumatic and dangerous. According to Panelli et al. (2009) rural environments are described as having strong cultural associations with settler-colonialism, heteronormativity and whiteness. According to Slocum (2011), agricultural landscapes are 'made through racial ideologies active in the labour market and the institutionalized racism that removed African-Americans, Mexican and Indigenous people from the land' (312). There have also been many reports of discrimination through rural racism (Cairns, 2013; Chakraborti and Garland, 2004) and accounts of systemic injustice against racialized farmworkers across North America (Holmes, 2013; Weiler et al., 2016).

This ideology has the impact of masking or erasing the histories and experiences of racialized people and thus points to the ways that romanticized histories and unexamined privilege shapes thinking about ecological agriculture. For example, it is not simply a coincidence that most farmers in rural Canada are white. Black history in North America began with people being violently displaced from regions of Africa to work on cotton, sugar and tobacco plantations in the Americas (Green et al., 2011; Hinson and Robinson, 2008). The legacy of being bought and sold as property to work in the fields is foundational to the beginnings of the dominant North American food system. For example, black loyalists in Canada were promised farming land in Nova Scotia after the American Revolution; however, Rawlyk (1968) notes that they received the poorest quality land which '... was virtually impossible to for any man to eke out an existence on from ten to forty acres of perhaps the worst land in Nova Scotia' (25). The lands were marginal, the soil was poor, difficult to clear, the climate was cold and growing seasons were short. Black loyalists were forced into isolated communities that 'were to be plagued by the combined ravages of crop failure, poverty, starvation, ignorance, and white prejudice' (Rawlyk, 1968: 24). From the onset, their livelihoods and self-determination were impacted by racial prejudice of surrounding white communities and discriminatory government policies. This included limited access to land, problematic lending practices and divisive property regulations that fuelled the lack of opportunities for black farmers (Hinson and Robinson, 2008). Studies in the US show that there has been a 98% decrease in the numbers of black farmers between 1920 and 1997, whereas numbers of white farmers fell by 68% during the same time period (Wood and Gilbert, 2000). While there is no single reason for this decline, scholars agree that both structural and individual racism played a significant role (Brown et al., 1994; Gilbert et al., 2002; Havard, 2001).

This brief discussion demonstrates the complicated history and relationships of racialized people to farming and agriculture. Agriculture is embedded in a traumatic history of dispossession and oppression and racialized groups continue to struggle with the legacy of these realities. Many of the ideas and practices that inform our understanding of food production, crop diversity, seed saving and storage stem from the extraction of racialized people's knowledges, colonial land acquisition and labour exploitation (Etmanski, 2012). The dominant food and agricultural system has been established and maintained on the backs of unpaid and low waged racialized and gendered labour (Ammons, 2014). The construction of agricultural workers as less deserving has contributed to the structural conditions for low wages and the perception that farm work does not necessitate fair compensation. Acknowledging the ways that agriculture and food systems privilege a dominant white narrative is an important context for the proceeding discussion about ecological agricultural internships.

Methods

In this paper, we draw on research from an Ontario-wide study that explored the nature of internships on small- and medium-scale ecologically oriented farms. The project was motivated by a desire to explore the expansion in the numbers of internships across North America as a substitute for adequate educational and training opportunities. Further, we were interested in the complex issues that emerged as ecological farmers appeared to be dependent on interns to operate their farms. Our broader research studied the tensions between the exploitative nature of farmer–intern relationships as well as related tensions within food movements concerned with social and environmental justice. When the research began, it did not initially occur to us that the demographics of interns was so narrow. However, after an exploratory investigation, it became clear that this was an issue requiring further examination. Beyond our intellectual interest in this subject matter, we both have personal relationships to these issues. Charles Levkoe is a white, university faculty member studying food sovereignty movements and was part of the original research team. Prior to entering academia, he worked as an intern for two years and later, as the co-owner of an ecological farm that recruited interns to support the farm's operations. Abena Offeh-Gyimah is a black woman who became part of the research project first as an intern at a non-profit urban community farm and later as organizational staff and then a PhD student studying black agrarianism. Following collaborative discussions and presentations about the demographics of ecological interns, they agreed to collaborate on this paper as a way to explore the data and related scholarship and practice.

To begin the research, we conducted two online surveys between December and March in 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 that targeted ecologically oriented farms in Ontario hosting interns. The survey was sent out to a list of 240 community shared agriculture farms and through a series of listservs hosted by organizations involved in supporting ecological farming. In total, we received 200 unique responses from farmers hosting interns, of which 139 were complete. This paper also draws from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with interns ($n \sim 36$) and farmers hosting interns ($n \sim 28$) conducted towards the latter part of the growing season (between July and November) in 2014 and 2015. Farms involved in our study were drawn from survey respondents and selected to include different internship models based on a diversity of locations, types of production, ecological farming practices and net incomes. Additional farms were added to the initial list using snowball sampling methods to ensure a greater variety in the study population. In all cases, interviews were conducted on-farm with the lead farmer and as many interns as were available. Of the 29 farms visited, 24 were located in rural communities and five were located in urban centres. All interviews followed a standard questionnaire and were digitally recorded. We recognize the positionality of the researchers may have impacted the relationship with participants and in turn, the interview data collected. Particularly, Levkoe's experience as an intern and farmer might have elicited a degree of comfort among some participants. Similarly, as a white cisgender man, this could have adversely impacted responses from racialized participants. In part, Offeh-Gyimah's co-authorship of this paper was intended to bring an additional perspective to the data analysis and knowledge construction. The interviews were all transcribed and coded for recurrent themes using NVivo software. In accordance with our ethics protocol, we guaranteed participants' anonymity to protect their identity. The information from the interviews is presented in the text below, and where quotes have been used, personal details have been obscured.

Research findings

In the initial survey, farmers were asked to report on the demographics of the interns they had hosted in the past year. While these responses were based on farmer's reports, the trends reflected the data collected from interns that were interviewed. First, the survey reported that 60% of all interns were women; 14% were racialized people, while 86% were white¹; and 74% of interns had a university or college degree, while 23% held a high school diploma or less. Further, 75% were between the ages of 16 and 30 with 2% under 16 and 17% between 30 and 50 years old. Of the 36 interviews with interns, we met with eight racialized people, with the majority working on urban farms. Of note, all but two of the farmers we met with self-reported as white, one running a rural internship programme and one an urban internship programme. This narrow demographic was acknowledged by a number of farmers. For example, one farmer stated directly, 'White, middle-class, female, educated, suburban. That was almost all of ours [interns]'. In short, the vast majority of ecological farm interns were white women, under 30 years old who held an undergraduate or graduate university degree. It also became clear that there were significant differences between the interns working in urban environments and those on rural farms.

Privilege and stigma of unpaid farm work

Speaking with interns, it became clear that those who were able to participate in internships on rural farms and spend eight months working without a wage had a high degree of social and economic privilege. This was often associated with coming to an internship with a postsecondary education, financial supports and other socioeconomic advantages. For example, many of the white interns expressed that they were able to work without a wage because of family supports, economic or otherwise. These individuals often articulated this opportunity as 'choice', without recognizing or acknowledging their own privilege and the structural barriers faced by others. One intern explained,

My parents have helped me out though. I mean if I was in a pinch, I could ask them for money. I've really tried not to, but I definitely have gotten some help from them over the years, mostly with an emergency car and medical stuff.

Another factor illuminating the privilege of certain interns was in their access to land and resources. A number of the white interns told us they had land waiting for them inherited from family or that they had funds available (often not their own) to purchase land upon completion of the internship. This was not a reality for any of the racialized interns we spoke with. One intern articulated the class privilege associated with accessing land:

Whether you are able to be on land and pursue that dream of farming - the few people we know doing it, it feels almost directly [related] to how much wealth is in their family and has almost zero correlation to what their skills are and what level they are at as a farmer.

Many racialized and lower income people tend to come to internships with little economic supports and are less likely than their white counterparts to purchase land and establish their own farm following the internship. Historical loss of land and lack of access to land are barriers to the same opportunities than interns coming with more privilege possess.

Another issue identified in our interviews was that ecological farm internships were typically advertised and promoted through specific agricultural and environmental websites or shared through word-of-mouth and personal networks. Some of the racialized people doing urban farm internships that we interviewed did not know rural internships were even a possibility. The implication of promoting internships within specific places excludes

racialized and low-income people by taking advantage of networks available to privileged communities for recruitment.

We also found that many racialized interns identified a stigma around farming as a job or career path, especially when it was unpaid. In part, this related to tensions surrounding ideas about what was considered to be 'successful' employment, but also associated with negative historical experiences of farming and gardening. In some cases, farming was described as lifestyle that many parents hoped their children would avoid. One Chinese-identified intern explained,

I guess for us, it's not so much the economics as the prestige. Like you know, you don't want to be a farmer. It's like your parents must have gone aside, must have been completely off with the parenting for you to become a farmer . . . A lot of people of colour have migrated here from a very hard-working farm life that they don't want their kids in. I've heard stories like that and I have friends that tell me their parents used to farm and they hated it, so they didn't want them to farm . . . My mom was like, 'You're too educated to be a farmer. What are you doing?'

In a discussion about the kinds of interns coming to his farm, a Chilean-identified farmer echoed similar sentiments,

A lot of other cultures think that it's below them to go and take these base labour jobs. They're menial jobs and I think that there's a cultural difference, you know, that for a white kid who's maybe not saddled with what it means to be an immigrant, there's no stigma to taking that. They're going out and they're just doing a job and they're sowing their oats, they're pulling a Jack London and going out to see the world . . . But for other cultures, many of them came from farming, they're like, 'Look, please don't farm. We've done everything we can to get you out of farming because farming was poverty and a cycle where people didn't have'.

In summary, racialized interns discussed that their communities related to farming as 'traumatic work' through negative historical experiences. While these same interns often described the work as 'pleasurable' or a good 'learning experience', there was little expressed desire to adopt farming as a long-term career. It was also clear that there were a number of barriers faced by racialized and lower income people to participating in ecological farm internships. Here, many lacked the financial means and the time to spend a season farming without a wage. Unlike white interns we spoke with, some racialized and/or lower income interns, while appreciating their educational experience, explained that they needed to take on a paying job, take care of family and/or be closer to home. These individuals also identified the reality that there were limited well paid and secure job prospects for those with farm experience.

Rural environments and race

There was a general sentiment among interviewees that rural environments were more available and accessible to white interns. While there were some internship programmes offered on urban ecological farms (discussed in the next sub-section), the vast majority were based on farms located in rural and peri-urban environments. The lack of accessibility of rural environments to racialized interns was reflected in expressions that they were not considered to be safe spaces, both historically and culturally. One black intern stated,

[White people] are entitled to being there. Like why do I want to go to northern Ontario? I'm going to be the only black person. That's uncomfortable, right? In many places, you'd be the only person of colour amongst the army of white people.

This statement was about more than just the demographics of who inhabits rural spaces but also about the kinds of produce being cultivated, the cultural practices and networks with which farms were engaged. Because of the complicated relationships racialized people have with rural spaces, the experiences and outcomes of internship programs were not the same for all people.

This trend was parallel by the feelings of white interns that identified a sense of comfort and belonging in rural spaces. A sense of agrarian idealism was expressed in the following quotes from two white interns,

I think perhaps in white culture, being out in nature is a leisurely thing. When you have access to nature, then you're doing well . . . White people who have access to cottages growing up, perhaps those are the people that are interested in farming because they already have a relationship to the natural world, more than people that are urbanized – for example, that are too poor to leave the city don't have that same kind of relationship and that same kind of love for nature.

I definitely think starting out, most white North American immigrants were farmers of some sort, so I think there's probably some genetic thing that has gone on, definitely with identity. I think a lot of whiteness has to do with finding a real white identity because I feel like any other race or ethnicity has more of an authentic identity.

In this sense, race and space intersect – race shapes space and space also shapes race. History and culture shape space, which inadvertently inform where people feel that they belong, how to act or what to expect in a particular space. In this instance, rural internships may produce inequitable learning spaces for racialized interns.

Possibilities of urban farm internships

While rural ecological farm interns were primarily white, we found that interns on urban farms exhibited much greater diversity. In most cases, urban interns represented a much broader range of genders, ages, ethnicities, races and levels of education. After speaking with many of the interns working on urban farms, we found that urban internship programmes offered a range of educational opportunities for racialized and lower income people that did not exist in rural spaces. Reflecting on interactions with urban farmers and interns at an ecological farming conference, a racialized rural intern commented, 'In the urban intern world, it's a lot more diverse'.

In urban farm internships, a greater diversity of race, class and gender realities were integrated into the context and socioeconomic realities where the interns live and work. Most interns lived in close proximity to the location of their training or had access to public transit as opposed to living and working in isolation on rural farm. A rural farmer that was also a board member for an urban internship programme made the following observation,

[For urban internships], everyone is local and some of the folks haven't finished high school and won't finish high school. And last year's cohort was a little older. We had a few people that were new to Canada, up to 41 years old.

Racialized people that participate in urban farm internships were often marginalized from food knowledge, land ownership and outdoor experiences. These internships tended to emphasize aspects of community building, leadership and food education. The value was placed on training to become leaders, especially in communities that have been marginalized. These urban internships often went a step further to focus on personal development and connection to social, environmental and economic issues within their communities.

There were a number of common features we found among internship programmes that supported a broader diversity of participants. For example, of the five urban farms we visited, all of them were either registered as a non-profit organization or were engaged in community development and social entrepreneurship activities that went beyond simply producing food for sale.

Many of the urban ecological farm programmes made efforts to ensure the internships were accessible to a broad range of participants. For example, a number of the programmes offered travel subsidies, food and other supports for participants. Being able to live at home and work in their neighbourhoods was identified as valuable feature for many urban interns. The internship programmes and the work itself reflected a sense of the community's identity and needs through flexible hours, in some cases paying a wage, and growing ethnic-specific crops, something not seen in any of the rural internship programmes. The urban internship programmes also made specific efforts to recruit local community residents, especially marginalized people as both participants and leaders. Some urban farm internship programmes had received funding through grants for this specific purpose. An urban farmer explained these features,

There are a lot of benefits to our [urban] internship program specifically. They don't have to leave the city. It's right in an urban environment. A lot of it is transit accessible and most of the interns have bicycles. They're going to bike between the different gardens and they don't have to give up their day job, if they have one. Or if they're in school, they can fit into their summers or vacation or summer working plans.

Another feature of urban internships is that many offer educational benefits and opportunities beyond only farm training. For example, some of the urban farms offered a series of anti-oppression trainings, training in skills and knowledge more applicable to non-farm jobs (e.g. employment skills) and leadership training. Many of these additional opportunities were much more relevant to the interns involved in these programmes. A black urban intern expressed,

Growing food means different things in different spaces, and for different bodies. For some people, it's access to healthy food, access to their histories or a space for healing. In this community where people are marginalized, it can be a space of coming together to talk about issues.

Other farm activities beyond selling produce included community organizing, engaging in neighbourhood policy and advocacy, building connections with urban food justice networks and offering land for personal farming.

Among many of the urban farm internship programmes, diversity was also reflected in the people involved (e.g. staff, farmers and other interns) and in the kinds of work being done (e.g. the types of crops). For most of the urban farms, this was a deliberate decision to foster leadership and participation. A rural farmer and board member of a successful urban farm internship programme explained,

A big part [of paying interns] is also the nature of how we want this farm to be staffed going forward. We pay a lot of attention to farmer training because those are the people that we want to hire next year and being a white organization from the country and working in Jane and Finch, it's not going to work to just keep bringing in kids like me. We have got to find people from here that want to build this project in the right way.

Urban farm internships offered unique experiences that tended to be much more inclusive; however, we also noted that the kinds of farm-based education were much different than

most rural experiences. One major limitation was that the quality of farm training was significantly lower on urban farms. On most rural farms we visited, interns would work long days and were deeply involved in a range of farm-based activities that required long-term commitment and living on-site. Urban interns often worked fewer hours with a loose programme of work and training. Further, many of the urban ecological farms were running on grants so they were not as focused on profit generation. While many rural interns discussed the long hours and difficult working conditions, an urban intern explained,

The work wasn't tremendously difficult. It didn't take much education or a specific skill to do, which is why it is fair to be volunteer work. Anybody could do it. I guess it was more of a relaxing, hobby-type activity rather than work, *per se*.

A rural farmer and board member of an urban farm internship programme discussed the different levels of training on urban and rural farms and suggested that this was often rooted in white privilege.

There are certain things that we rely on experienced farmers to do versus people that are new to the farm or new to growing. And when the experienced [rural] farmers are all white farmers who have had the privilege to be able to go through an internship or work for little pay for a long time, then there are certain jobs that the white farmers end up doing. And that's something that we're not comfortable with, the black [urban] farmers aren't comfortable with it and that's a very real thing. This is really a discussion of qualification and how that qualification is rooted in privilege.

Discussion

Many aspiring farmers with non-agricultural backgrounds are using internships as a way to learn from experienced farmers and gain hands-on, experiential education. However, our research suggests that as a pedagogical model, the structure of rural farm internships excludes racialized people creating significant barriers to entry and limiting access to the subsequent knowledge and skills awarded as part of the experience. Farm internships privilege white, middle class people who have the social and financial capital to live in a rural community and work without a wage. Urban farm internships offer a different kind of ecological farming experience, and while there are many advantages, the quality of farm-based education tends to be lower. This means that the predominantly racialized people involved in urban internship programmes have less access to the education, training and other privileges that are associated with rural internship experiences. Furthermore, there also appear to be significant barriers to building a more diverse ecological agricultural sector by promoting a particular kind of farmer. These findings highlight the racial and class divisions with rural internships producing an exclusive group of new farmers and food movement advocates.

The exclusivity of rural internships raises important questions about who has the ability to farm or be on the land. This points to the different perspectives surrounding the experiences of farming. For racialized communities, ideals of farming can include an association with slavery and indentured servitude. Other negative connotations include farming as a low-paid or unprofitable profession, a career awarded little respect and generally considered to be difficult and low skilled. For many racialized people, labour is fundamentally a question of exploitation and exclusion. There is particular value attached to whiteness and farming and for those that work the land that determine places and spaces of belonging. Following from this, interrogating the value and meaning of an internship for

racialized and low-income interns highlights the challenges of including greater diversity in an internship programme. Encouraging and creating opportunities for racialized people without addressing how internships continue to promote particular values, and an agrarian idealism puts alternative food movements at a greater risk of further deepening inequities.

Tackling issues of race and class within food systems have been driven by food justice scholars and activists over the past decade. Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) write, 'Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities' (ix). Through an analysis of the structural drivers of injustice in food systems, Sbicca (2018) argues that food should not be the soul site of struggle because racism cannot be addressed in a vacuum. In contrast to apolitical and individual approaches, he suggests that solutions must first identify the root causes of injustice and then work to tackle them. This includes drawing attention to the voices and experiences of racialized people, highlighting collective resistance to the dominant system and initiatives that advocate for equitable distribution of the benefits and risks throughout food systems as well as fostering solidarity with other social justice movements (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Allen and Wilson, 2008). Notably, food movements are not always synonymous with the ideals of food justice. There are several primary ontological concerns in food justice that many initiatives have failed to adequately address. While food justice is concerned with struggles against exploitation, racism and oppression that shape the dominant food system, food movements tend to be associated with consumer choice (Levkoe, 2011). In short, while alternative food movements advocate for local and healthy food, food justice goes further by seeking equity within all food systems structures and relationships.

Another major critique of food movements is their failure to create spaces for the experiences of racialized people, for example pointing to the predominant leadership of white middle-class activists (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Etmanski, 2012). Questioning the relationship between food and race is to risk causing discomfort among dominant cultures, which serves to preserve the privileged of whiteness. Jackson (2011) notes that white people are often reluctant to admit that they benefit in real and tangible ways from racist structures and even if they come to that realization, participation in antiracism activities is often determined by how their interests are also served by the larger racial project. Hence, food movements, in attempts to write in race as part of its narrative, have both intentionally and unintentionally participated in the broader project of white supremacy.

Looking to solutions should not become a race to inclusivity but rather a desire to re-imagine farmer education and training using an intersectional lens – one that considers and addresses race and class in the context of colonialism and capitalism. Building on the work of food justice scholars and activists, conversations must move beyond a focus on issues of food in a way that individualizes the issues and minimizes the perspectives of racialized people. As a starting point, we need to see these challenges, not just as the problems of individual farms and/or programmes, but as a structural part of the dominant food system and society more broadly. Thus, we must ask, how do we train new farmers in a way that centres not only ecological approaches but also equity and justice?

We find a promising example of ecological farm internships attempting to address these issues in the relationship between BCCF and Everdale Environmental Learning Centre, two of the urban cases within our research study. BCCF is located in the Jane Finch community, one of Toronto's 'priority' neighbourhoods designated at-risk due to high levels of poverty, limited job prospects and disproportionate health issues. BCCF was founded in 2012 in

partnership with a number of organizations focused on food justice and sustainability food systems. The eight-acre property, owned by the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority, includes farmland, a heritage farmhouse and barn. Its vision is to establish an 'urban agricultural centre that engages, educates, and empowers diverse communities, through sustainable food' (BCCF, n.d.). BCCF runs an internship programme, where racialized youth are paid a wage to spend six months on the farm, learning about ecological agriculture and food systems as well as leadership and employment opportunities in the food sector. Programing includes hands-on farm work as well as anti-oppression workshops, leadership training and expanding social networks within and beyond the community. Interns are also deeply engaged with the surrounding neighbourhoods and through the integration of social justice theory and practice, they are involved in community development and a range of advocacy initiatives. Located about a two-hour drive from BCCF, Everdale is a community teaching farm with a mission to 'provide hands-on, solution-based food and farming education to build and engage healthy local communities' (Everdale, n.d.). As the core founding partner of BCCF, Everdale staff bring experience in running a successful ecological internship programme and Sustainable Farming Certificate (see Laforge and Levkoe, 2018). The BCCF internship model was rooted in social justice praxis and designed to work for the Jane Finch community and to ensure food justice as a core element of ecological agriculture for training the next generation of farmers and food systems advocates.

This example of BCCF highlights ways that ecological agricultural programmes can be developed to incorporate agricultural training along with social justice education and action. By incorporating food justice as a core element of the paid internships, BCCF highlights how farmer training might be structured in a way that contributes to food systems transformation. Participants from BCCF have played a leadership role in food movements as part of campaigns, conferences and research. Many interns have graduated to support other organizations and initiatives. The integration of agricultural education with critical perspectives on race and class is significantly different than educational programmes that focus only on food knowledge while ignoring structural inequity (Guthman, 2008a). Beyond the value of integrating agriculture, education and food justice demonstrated by BCCF, these benefits are also evident in a number of other urban agriculture education initiatives documented though a growing body of research (see Reese, 2019; Reynolds and Cohen, 2016; White, 2018). More broadly, racialized people taking control of ecological farm internships make important contributions to critical food systems education and food movements' work towards 'educational sovereignty', that Meek et al. (2019) describe as focused on 'communities' right to challenge enshrined systems of educational inequality, and develop their own educational systems' (12; see also Meek and Tarlau, 2015). This approach also resonates with ecological agriculture education efforts across the globe where Indigenous and peasant farmers have developed pedagogical models that share skills and knowledge while building the food sovereignty movement (Holt-Giménez, 2006; Meek, 2015).

Conclusion

In part, the exclusivity of ecological farm internships is rooted in white supremacy that dominates how we think about food. The narrow concept of what is alternative has been normalized and legitimized by a set of historical, cultural and institutional practices that continue to benefit the dominant paradigm while reproducing harmful and exclusionary outcomes for racialized people. The future of food movements cannot be limited to

increasing diversity as the solution or evaluating the contributions of racialized people in relation to a romanticized white narrative of farming. Following food justice scholars and activists, solutions must address structural issues that limit social justice, not only proximate challenges related to food and farming. As such, ecological farm internships present a dilemma for the future of food movements by demonstrating both the limits and opportunities of this educational model.

The exclusivity of ecological internships stands in opposition to the goals of food movements, a food system embedded in equity, diversity and difference. First and foremost, our research leads us to conclude that interns must be paid minimum wage, and ideally a living wage. If ecological farm trainees are involved in work that brings benefit to farm owners, they should be compensated adequately. Furthermore, ecological farm internships that embody a critical food systems pedagogy have the potential to train new farmers while also transforming food systems. Future research could explore existing programmes in other places that engage in ecological farm training from a food justice perspective. Ecological farm training and education needs to address more than just growing food, but incorporate principles and practices of dismantling racism, colonialism and exploitation in all its forms. This is prevalent among many urban-based farm training and education programmes where racialized people are taking leadership roles in education and action, demonstrating a resurgence in food justice as part of food movements. These ideals could be explored in more detail in relation to the growing agroecology and food sovereignty movements in the Global north (Rosset and Altieri, 2017; White, 2018; Wittman et al., 2010). Specifically, new research and applications of urban agroecology offer promising opportunities for educational innovation rooted in social and ecological justice and for bridging urban–rural divides (see, e.g. the RUAF Foundation, 2017). We suggest that ecological internship programmes build partnerships with food justice organizations and initiatives that are tackling issues of power through a social justice lens. This opportunity for mutual learning and action presents promise for the future of food movements.

Highlights

- Across North America, non-waged internships are a prominent way of training new ecological farmers through sharing farmers' knowledge and experience
- Our research reveals privileges associated with the ability to work for little or no remuneration and to access rural spaces where most internships are located
- The dominant model of ecological farm internships privileges white, middle-class young people and creates barriers to entry for racialized people
- This approach hinders opportunities for building a diverse ecological farming sector by reproducing a particular kind of farmer, further limiting the impact of food movements
- Re-imagined as part of a critical food systems education, ecological farm internships have the potential to train new farmers and transform food systems

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Note

1. For this question, the survey adapted classifications used by Statistics Canada, including 12 categories describing ethnic origin. The reference in this paper to ‘racialized people’ includes a combination of all categories other than ‘white’. The authors’ choice of language to represent this combined classification is a recognition of the description of identity typically ascribed by, and in relation to the dominant group. Of note, we recognize the limitations of our use of the category ‘racialized people’. While this classification has aided our analysis and interpretation of the data for the purposes of the paper’s subject matter, it also serves to homogenize non-white participants and the racialization process itself. We encourage future research to explore the nuances of participants’ identity including social class and gender as well as geographic and culturally informed positions of farming.

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