

The COVID-19 virus has jarred many people out of the illusion that globalised, corporate food is safe and secure. Yet, many people don't know what to do about it. Some have taken up backyard gardening and 'buying local', practices that are important for local food sovereignty. However, across Europe and North America, many of these responses remain couched within a market-based neoliberal paradigm. We desperately need to focus our action on breaking up corporate power in food systems and supporting long-term systemic changes.

Local food initiatives are crucial for building more just and sustainable food systems. They support locally-based economies and governance, they bring consumers in contact with producers and with their natural environment, build community, teach people about where their food comes from, circumvent agroindustrial food production and avoid supermarket monopolies. Home gardening can also provide healthy affordable food, opportunities to learn and to connect people with nature and food. However, local food initiatives and gardening would go much further in driving social change if they also confront structural inequalities and social exclusion.

First, individual gardening initiatives would have more impact if they were coupled with collective efforts to secure access to land, organise workshops or construct novel systems of local exchange, for example for those who don't have time to garden or money to purchase healthy local produce.

Second, while strong local communities are important for developing territorial food systems, this turn inwards to one's own community risks fostering exclusion and division. There is a need for intentional work in network building, solidarity and allyship with people from other communities or with different backgrounds.

Third, local food initiatives can often be depoliticised, focusing exclusively on the technical aspects of local food systems. Yet, citizens can simultaneously mobilise to influence the governance of food systems by working with (local) governments, confronting structural inequity in food initiatives (e.g. anti-racism), or engaging in contentious politics to confront policies and practices that lock in corporate food systems.

Fourth, these localised initiatives in the global north often fail to confront the ongoing colonial relationship between corporations, 'eaters', elite groups and governments in the global north with food producers and communities in the global south. The only way to topple this model is through broad-based collective learning and transnational action that reveals and deconstructs the ongoing colonial relationships at play in food systems.

Working against the grain, social movements are amplifying the political dimensions of local food initiatives. They are advancing economic models based on feminist and degrowth economics that move far beyond the profit-motive of capitalist economic logic. We need to continue to shift our efforts from individual to collective, exclusive to inclusive, and technical to political to break up corporate power and other intersecting oppressions.

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Pivoting from local food to just food systems