

TENDING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND FOOD CITIZENSHIP IN TORONTO'S COMMUNITY GARDENS*

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ABSTRACT. Scattered throughout the city of Toronto are more than 110 community gardens, sites of place-based politics connected to the community food-security movement. The gardens, spaces where passions for plants and food are shared, reflect the city's shifting cultural landscape and represent an everyday activity that is imbued with multiple meanings. Toronto's community food-security movement uses gardens as one strategy to regenerate the local food system and provide access to healthy, affordable food. Three garden case studies expand on the complexities of "food citizenship," illustrating the importance of that concept to notions of food security. The gardens reveal the role gardeners play in transforming urban spaces, the complex network of organizations working cooperatively and in partnership to implement these projects, and the way in which social and cultural pluralism are shaping the urban landscape. *Keywords:* community food security, community gardens, food citizenship, Toronto.

Three community-garden sites in Toronto offer possibilities for understanding how individuals and groups in urban communities are actively producing space and culture through their constructions of place. This article begins with a discussion of the politics of place and the multiple meanings imbued in community gardens in Toronto. The discussion is then linked to the notion of "food citizenship" emerging from the literature on alternative food networks and movements. A close examination of three community-garden sites presents an opportunity to explore these notions of citizenship and offers valuable insights into how democratic practices are being cultivated in community gardens and by the community food-security (CFS) movement.

The case studies provide colorful examples of how people are transforming bleak urban spaces into community gardens. Through their gardening activities the gardeners are actively shaping their community, connecting cross-culturally, and being drawn into broader social movements like the CFS movement through their associations with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Gardening in these examples is an activity that implicitly challenges the corporate food system by creating an opportunity for people to dirty their hands, grow their own food, work with their neighbors, and generally transform themselves from consumers of food into "soil citizens" (Esteva and Prakash 1998; DeLind 2002).

Toronto's CFS movement strives to reach out to the city's ethnocultural communities but does not always succeed in involving them in food projects and events

* Special thanks to all the gardeners who tirelessly accommodated my requests to document their gardening activities and who generously shared their stories and experiences. This project would not have been possible without the support of FoodShare Toronto, the student researchers, and the Urban Issues Program of the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation.

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(Baker and Huh 2003). The garden examples reveal the geographical and cultural barriers to participation in place-based social movements, the need for food-systems education, and the challenges of organizing cross-culturally in a dynamic, diverse city. The concept of "food citizenship," as it has been articulated within the CFS movement and in the alternative food networks literature, is complicated and challenged by the case studies. Community gardens in Toronto provide an interesting example of how one activity can be imbued with multiple meanings and how gardens are multilayered, multidimensional landscapes worthy of examination.

Community gardens in Toronto are places of "counter-hegemonic democratic politics" (Dirlik and Prazniak 2001, 3), where the complexities of power, culture, and the economy become clear and where the intersections between food and various other social, economic, and environmental issues are revealed. By digging into their small plot of land, gardeners are challenging conventional ideas of urban planning and design, working on community-development projects, engaging with place-based social movements, and creating alternative food systems. The multiple meanings of community-gardening activities change with the perspective of the diverse actors involved: gardeners, alternative food movement activists, community organizers, property managers, public-housing staff, and others.

Christopher Airriess and David Clawson, in their study of Vietnamese market gardens in New Orleans (1994, 19), noted that the gardens tended by Vietnamese seniors represent "an opportunity to create order in a new socioeconomic environment over which they [the gardeners] otherwise have little control." Gerda Wekerle suggested, in her study of first-generation Canadian immigrant gardeners (2000, 1), that their gardens are examples of how Toronto's cultural landscape is beginning to reflect the diversity of immigrant communities. Karen Schmelzkopf (1995) described how community gardens on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City provide low-income residents with an opportunity to connect with nature and their community and to engage with local nonprofit organizations and municipal authorities working to preserve urban green space and support neighborhood revitalization efforts. The New York City gardens are political spaces on at least three levels, as documented by Schmelzkopf. First, gardeners must defend their gardening activities against disapproving residents. Second, gardeners mediate conflicts among themselves that arise from issues related to garden organization, as well as gender and ethnic differences. Third, gardeners continually defend, in partnership with nonprofit organizations, their right to garden on prime development land. Parallels can be found in the studies by Airriess and Clawson, Wekerle, Schmelzkopf, and this study of community gardens in Toronto. In all cases, gardens are linked to place-based politics and illustrate how important gardening activity is to the cultural landscapes of cities across North America (Kurtz 2001; Smith and Kurtz 2003).

This gardening activity is not always explicitly political. Many gardeners state that they garden as part of their everyday routine, to grow culturally appropriate food, to save money on their food expenses, to connect with their neighbors, or to

exercise. But from urban gardening arise conflicts that render visible the politics of everyday life. The gardens are places where the "cultural-becomes-political" (Escobar 2001, 156). Arturo Escobar uses this term to describe the complexity of locality and community and the ecological and cultural practices that form the basis for alternatives to conventional development.

The CFS movement supports community gardens as part of a broader strategy to increase food security.¹ In Toronto the CFS movement has been successful in increasing the number of gardens in the city, partnering with the local municipality to provide services to gardeners, and networking among its supporters to organize gardening events, publicize gardens, and advocate on behalf of gardeners. Toronto's community-gardening movement addresses a broad range of social, ecological, and political issues that include food access, garden siting, gardener support, advocacy, soil fertility, and community development (see, for example, [<http://www.foodshare.net/>]). Cultural identity, citizenship, and democratic practice are central issues for the NGOs that support community gardening.

LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Dominant conceptualizations of cities like Toronto tend to exclude the voices of high-rise apartment residents, people living outside the core downtown areas, residents of public housing, and new immigrants. With its primary focus on protecting gentrified neighborhoods, attracting industry, and reintensifying the urban core, Toronto's *Official Plan* fails to adequately acknowledge these groups (City of Toronto 2002).² The reality of the city's social and cultural pluralism, and the multiple meanings with which people infuse the landscape, are lost.

Toronto's demographics reflect the modern diaspora. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of immigrants is higher in Toronto than in any other city in the world (Carey 2002). Over the past decade 43 percent of all newcomers entering Canada settled in the Greater Toronto Area. Recent waves of immigration have etched changes on Toronto's urban landscape, particularly outside the downtown core areas historically characterized by ethnic enclaves such as China Town, Little India, and the Greek Village. Suburban strip malls, for example, now take on characteristics of the local ethnocultural population. Mixed in with the doughnut shops and gasoline stations are halal butchers, Caribbean grocers, and colorful sari shops.

Hidden away in corners of public parks, on apartment-building properties, in backyards, on rooftops, and behind churches are Toronto's 110 community gardens, many of which reflect the city's increasing ethnocultural diversity in the faces of the gardeners and the varieties of plants they grow. Immigrant gardeners bring local knowledge from around the world and adapt it to urban gardening spaces in the city of Toronto. As in the example of New Orleans's Vietnamese market gardens (Airriess and Clawson 1994), many of Toronto's community-garden plots reflect the landscape memories of their gardeners.

Over the past decade the prominence of community gardens in Toronto's landscape has increased. Surveys of the number of gardens from 1987 and 1997 show an

increase from fourteen to sixty-nine gardens in that time period (Irvine, Johnson, and Peters 1999, 39). The Toronto Community Garden Network, formed in 1999 by a coalition of NGOs working on urban gardening and CFS, supports the 110 gardens and the approximately 3,300 gardeners that currently exist in the city, according to Laura Berman (2004), manager of an urban agriculture program. The gardens serve a variety of purposes and are organized in a number of ways. Started and coordinated by neighborhood community groups, women's shelters, public-housing staff, and nonprofit organizations, the gardens are spaces where a spectrum of activities take place—from recreational gardening, to cultivating food for personal consumption or community kitchens, to selling food from the gardens as part of micro-enterprise projects. The gardens meet a variety of personal and societal needs. They provide social and recreational opportunities, supplement nutrition, educate the public about food production and preparation, are part of community-development strategies, offset income needs, and “green” the urban environment. The benefits of community gardening have been widely documented (Blair, Giesecke, and Sherman 1991; Berman 1997; Malakoff 2004). Community-gardening activities in North America and Europe are part of international urban agricultural activity that is being recognized globally by health professionals, urban planners, environmental activists, community organizers, and policymakers as an important contributor to economic development, food security, and environmental management (Smit and Nasr 1992; UNDP 1996; Mougeot 1999).

Community gardening and urban agriculture have become important aspects of the CFS movement as it has developed over the past decade. The movement advocates for, develops, and promotes alternative food networks that improve access to food and encourages people to “delink” from the global corporate food system (CFSC 2004; Wekerle 2004, 381). The movement aims to cultivate democratic food practices by raising awareness of where food comes from (food-systems education), encouraging commensality, and promoting consumption of locally grown food. A recent fund-raising and promotional campaign by an NGO encouraged Torontonians to “Grow It, Eat It and Share It” (see [<http://www.foodshare.net/>]). Community gardens have been promoted as one way for people to become “food citizens” and are purported to be an important part of the shift toward ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just food systems (DeLind 2002; Hassanein 2003; Wekerle 2004).

Increasingly, the CFS movement is being framed as a new social movement (Starr 2000, 225; Allen and others 2003, 63; Wekerle 2004, 378). Research on the proliferation of alternative food networks has focused on such disparate issues as scale, the challenges of bridging social justice and environmental issues, and the limitations of local projects (Allen and others 2003; Hinrichs 2003; Johnston 2003; Johnston and Baker 2005). In this literature, alternative food networks are articulated as political spaces that engage people in democratic practices that occur as part of everyday life and simultaneously have an impact on policy at various levels. These democratic practices are part of creating “food citizens” who not only are consum-

ers but also are engaged in their communities and have an “intimate” connection to the food they eat (Winson 1993; Welsh and MacRae 1998; DeLind 2002; Hassanein 2003; Wekerle 2004).

Defining aspects of food citizenship can be extracted from the literature on alternative food networks. Moving beyond the notion of people as consumers of food, Jennifer Welsh and Rod MacRae focused on participation as an essential part of food citizenship, starting with community food projects and policies that are grounded in democratic practices (1998, 246). Community food projects promote the social and cultural components of local, sustainably grown food. Moving beyond an anticorporate focus, the CFS movement recognizes community gardens as “commons . . . that expand and deepen cultural and ecological vision and mold citizenship” (DeLind 2002, 222). Laura DeLind, in her description of food citizenship, explores the idea of “soil citizenship,” stating how participation, physically working on a community project, and the reverence for nature found in community gardening contribute to the shift in values that is needed for food-system transformation (p. 223). These theorists are expanding formal notions of citizenship that focus on the political rights and responsibilities of citizens. The gardeners discussed below are practicing citizenship through their everyday activities in the garden. As they claim their “soil right” to Canadian citizenship, they transplant gardening techniques, plants, and cultural and landscape meaning from their “home” countries to Toronto’s urban landscapes (Joseph 1999). Food citizenship involves the practice of food-system localization and embodies values of caring for “place”—the community and the environment. In a multicultural city like Toronto, these values fuse cultural diversity with landscape diversity, reflecting the contemporary diaspora.³

GARDEN CASE STUDIES

The Frances Beavis, Shamba, and Riverside Community Gardens in Toronto participated in a three-year research and community-development effort, entitled “Seeds of Our City” (soc), to collect case-study data from eight community-garden sites in Toronto (Figure 1).⁴ The project was initiated by FoodShare, one of the leaders of Toronto’s CFS movement, and involved four other community partners.⁵ The soc case studies illustrate the scope and complexity of community gardens as they relate to the CFS movement and expanded notions of citizenship.

FoodShare was founded in 1985 by a group of politicians and citizens concerned about the growth of hunger and the increase in food banks that took place in Canada in the wake of the economic recession in the early 1980s. The organization’s original mandate was to provide emergency food information to Toronto residents and examine why hunger was increasing in the city. FoodShare’s programs expanded over time to include a number of projects that promote long-term solutions to urban hunger. From the very beginning FoodShare was involved in community gardening, which has offered the organization a way to address food-security goals that include advocating for increases in social-assistance levels and the minimum wage,

promoting the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, and encouraging regional sustainable-agriculture practices (Field and Mendiratta 2000). To meet these goals, FoodShare partners with local NGOs, as well as government and businesses, in a variety of community-based food initiatives, including the Good Food Box, the Field to Table Catering Company, an urban agriculture program, the Food Link Hotline, and the Focus on Food youth training program (for a detailed description of these programs, see [<http://www.foodshare.net/>]), coupled with ongoing food-systems education and advocacy work.

The unique characteristics of Toronto's food movement have been widely documented (Welsh and MacRae 1998; Moffett and Morgan 1999; Scharf 1999; Johnston and Baker 2005). A dynamic relationship between CFS organizations and the municipality of Toronto, due primarily to the existence of the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), makes Toronto an interesting example from the North American CFS movement. The TFPC is a multistakeholder subcommittee of Toronto's Board of Health that addresses food-security issues ranging from food access, poverty, health, and nutrition to environment, planning, agriculture, and urban sprawl. The TFPC provides CFS organizations in Toronto with access to municipal policymakers, advocates for municipal recognition of food issues, and funds community food initiatives.

The three garden case studies below illustrate the diversity of players involved in the community-gardening movement, how these players are shaping the urban landscape, how they are making cross-cultural connections, and how they are being drawn into the broader CFS movement. Community gardeners often work simultaneously with NGO staff members, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the TFPC, property-management companies, and private or public funders. These partnerships are not without their challenges and often involve conflicts over use, space, process, and meaning that become part of the gardener's everyday gardening activity.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

FoodShare's case studies of gardens in Toronto had two parallel goals (Baker 2002, 3). First, the project represented an opportunity to answer questions about community gardening in Toronto that had been pressing for several years. How much food is being grown in Toronto's community gardens? What kind of crops are being grown? How is cultural diversity linked to biodiversity? Who participates in community gardening? How are gardens started and maintained? Are community gardeners participating in the wider CFS movement? A participatory research process involved gardeners in documenting their gardening activities and harvest. Key informant interviews and garden mapping were also undertaken. The second and simultaneous goal for FoodShare was related to community development. FoodShare was interested in engaging immigrant gardeners in the broader CFS movement and used the SOC project as a way to connect the gardeners to each other and the movement and as a way to explore barriers to their participation. Gardeners were invited

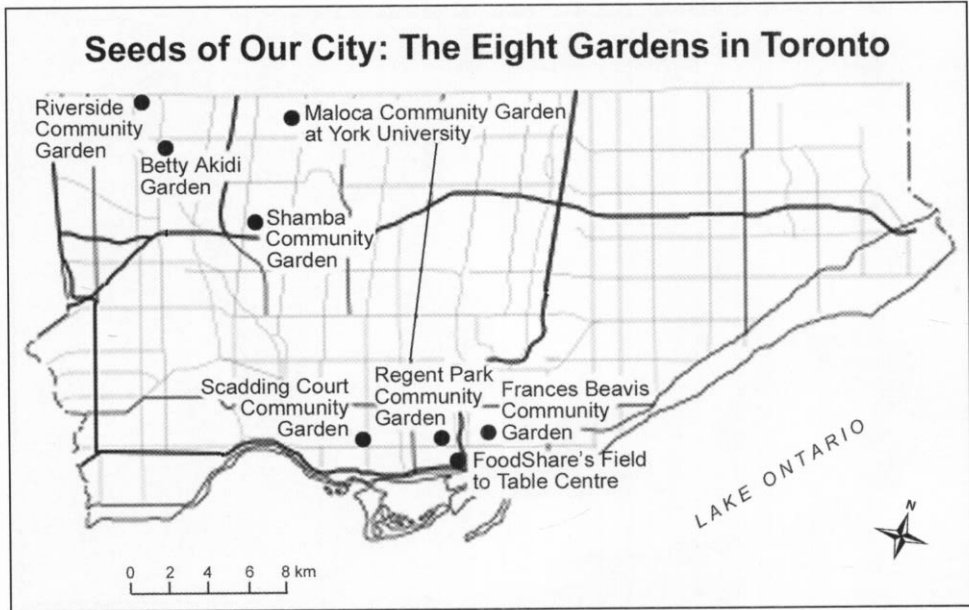


FIG. 1—Locations of the eight community gardens that were studied by FoodShare in the Seeds of Our City Project. (Cartography by Carolyn King, Department of Geography, York University)

to and participated in FoodShare events. Exchanges were organized for gardeners participating in the project, and workshops were held at the individual gardens on topics, such as composting or soil fertility, that the gardeners identified as interesting or relevant. The gardeners were involved in monitoring their own gardening activities and collecting information about their methods and their harvest. Garden tours not only publicized the gardens and the gardeners' achievements but also provided the gardeners with opportunities to become acquainted with one another, share gardening information, and be inspired by each other's work. The NGOs involved in the project have been a part of a decade-long advocacy process that has ultimately fed into the municipal policymaking process (Baker 2002, 53–56). The soc project was a way not only to document the political space created in community gardens, and the cultural transformation of Toronto's landscape, but also to contribute to municipal policy processes.

Through this participatory research and community-development process the multiple meanings of the gardens were revealed, and the gardens emerged as dynamic, multilayered, multidimensional landscapes. In the following sections, after a brief characterization of each of the three community-garden sites, examples from the soc research process highlight the opportunities for and limitations of "food citizenship" and place-based social movements and show how the project findings both challenge and expand notions of citizenship as reflected in the alternative food-systems literature. The garden stories provide vivid illustrations of how gardeners are producing space and culture through their constructions of place.



FIG. 2—The seniors' gardening group at the Frances Beavis Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by the author, summer 2000; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

TABLE I—CROPS GROWN IN TORONTO'S FRANCES BEAVIS, SHAMBA, AND RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY GARDENS

CANADIAN COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME
Greens and herbs	
Amaranth	<i>Amaranthus tricolor</i>
Callaloo	<i>Amaranthus cruentus</i>
Entsai	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> Forsk.
Bok choy	<i>Brassica chinensis</i>
Shungiku, garland chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum coronarium</i>
Sweet potato spinach	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> L.
Squash and gourds	
Bitter melon	<i>Momordica charantia</i>
Hairy gourd	<i>Benincasa hispida</i> var. <i>chieh-gua</i>
Jamaican pumpkin	<i>Cucurbita moschata</i> var. <i>calabaza</i>
Other vegetables	
Eddoe, taro	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> var. <i>antiqorum</i>
Jute	<i>Corchorus olitorius</i> L.
Long bean	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i> ssp. <i>sesquipedalis</i>
Okra	<i>Hibiscus esculentus</i>
Sweet potato	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>
Vietnamese celery	<i>Enanthe javanica</i>
White egg eggplant	<i>Solanum ovigerum</i>



FIG. 3—Mrs. Wong in her garden at the Frances Beavis Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by Jin Huh, summer 2002; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

FRANCES BEAVIS COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Frances Beavis Community Garden, adjacent to a senior public-housing residence and tucked behind a downtown Toronto shopping mall, is one of Toronto's most productive gardening spaces. The garden is located in Toronto's ethnoculturally diverse South Riverdale neighborhood, which has a large Chinese population. A group of Chinese seniors living at the Frances Beavis residence (Figure 2) have transformed a small piece of land into a bountiful garden in which they grow Asian vegetables, such as bok choy, long bean, hairy gourd, bitter melon, and edible chrysanthemums, that are difficult to find in nearby supermarkets (Table I).


The garden was started in 1997 as a collaboration between the residents of the seniors' building and NGOs that included an environmental organization, Greenest



FIG. 4—Trellising at the Frances Beavis Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by the author, summer 2002; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

City, the Eastview Community Center, FoodShare, and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. As the garden project began, many people were concerned about whether it could be successful. The only space available for the garden was an abandoned lot used as a thoroughfare—considered unsafe—to access nearby train tracks. Eventually the project cleaned up the lot and created a productive garden that is enjoyed by the seniors from early in the morning to late in the evening eight months of the year.

For Mrs. Wong and the other Frances Beavis gardeners, the garden is an opportunity to use skills developed during their working careers as farmers in China and to grow culturally appropriate herbs and vegetables for the dishes they enjoy cooking (Figure 3). Mrs. Wong has a 2.7-square-meter garden that overflows with Asian vegetables. Not only are the vegetables densely planted, they climb tall structures made of scavenged materials: broken hockey sticks, broom handles, old pieces of wood (Figure 4). Companion planting, vertical gardening, and succession planting are all agricultural techniques used by the Frances Beavis gardeners to increase their yields, techniques adapted from methods the gardeners had used before they emigrated from China. When she was sixty years old, in 1981, Mrs. Wong came to Canada from the Toisan region of China, where she had grown squash, rice, yam, corn, and fruit. She uses the same trellising methods in her small plot in Toronto that she used on her farm in Toisan. The methods used in the Frances Beavis garden are appropriate for the crops grown and enable the gardeners to layer their small plots in a


菜園產品報告表

栽種人姓名: CHUNG WA WONG

請記錄每次在各下菜園的所有收穫, 並將日期、種類及數量記錄在以下的表格

例子:

收割日期	產品名稱	收割數量
06/22/2000	白菜	0.5 籃 (lb)
0.8/16/2000	節瓜 Hairy Gourd	3.5 磅 ✓
0.8/16/2000	苦瓜 Bitter G	1 磅 ✓
0.8/18 2000	松茸 mushroom 石西菜 (PARSLBY)	2 磅 ✓
0.8/23 2000	苦瓜 Bitter G	1 磅 ✓
0.8/23/2000	莧菜 * SPINACH (chinese, not american) (malabar)	1 磅 ✓
0.8/25/2000	節瓜 hairy	1.5 磅 1.5? ✓
0.8/25/2000	松茸 mushroom	1 磅 2 磅 ✓
09/6, 2000	節瓜 hairy	2 磅半 2 ½ ✓
9/7/2000	苦瓜 Bitter	2 磅 ✓
9/9, 2000	節瓜 hairy	3 磅 ✓
9/8/2000	節瓜 hairy	20 磅 ✓
9/19/2000	薯苗 SWEET POTATO (SHORT LEAVES)	2 磅 ✓

FIG. 5—Mrs. Wong's garden-monitoring sheet, documenting her harvest. Garden monitors volunteered to document their gardening activities for several years, describing the gardening methods they used, keeping track of their inputs, logging the amount of time they spent in the garden, and weighing the produce they harvested. (Reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

way that reaps maximum yields. The Frances Beavis gardeners without previous farming experience learn growing methods from Mrs. Wong and other gardeners, who share their expertise readily.

The Frances Beavis garden illustrates how small, urban places can be used to grow substantial amounts of food, something that is often questioned by skeptics of community gardening and urban agriculture. When compared with Agriculture Canada's statistics on the average production of mixed vegetables per square meter, the results documented by the Frances Beavis gardeners are staggering (Figure 5). In most cases the production is more than five times the national standard for mixed-vegetable production (OMAFRA 2004), in spite of the barriers articulated by the gardeners, which include the lack of compost and other fertilizers, vandalism, and an inconsistent supply of water (Baker 2002, 49). Gardens across the city, like the one at Frances Beavis, are an important aspect of the city's food security, enabling people from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds to cultivate, preserve, and prepare culturally appropriate food for themselves. The garden also illustrates the benefits of community gardening for seniors who live in public housing, particularly senior immigrants, many of whom do not speak English.

The story of how the Frances Beavis Community Garden was started sheds light on the complex networks of NGOs and community groups involved in producing garden spaces in Toronto. The idea for the garden was born when one of the Chinese senior residents saw a garden at another building in the city. Part of a seniors' program at Frances Beavis, this resident brought the idea of the garden to the program coordinator. At the same time, several NGOs—including Greenest City and FoodShare—were looking for places to start gardens in the downtown area, and they happened to employ a Mandarin-speaking coordinator. For the first several years, members of the Frances Beavis and NGO staffs worked hard to obtain municipal and Toronto Housing Authority permission to use the land for a garden. Frances Beavis residents' fears of vandalism were dispelled. Funding and resources for the basic construction and supplies needed for starting the garden were obtained. The Chinese seniors, with their lack of English-language skills and lack of access to funding and NGO resources, would have had a difficult time setting up the garden on their own. The network of NGOs, the Mandarin-speaking coordinator, and the strong partnerships among the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the NGOs involved in community gardening, and the municipality made the garden project possible.

The soc case-studies research revealed the geographical and cultural barriers that prevent ethnocultural groups from participating in community gardening and the food-security movement. For the gardeners, as they articulated in interviews, the garden represents a place where they can grow food and connect with their friends. They have been happy to work with NGOs on various special projects. For example, they have participated in shopping excursions as part of an exercise to document the "food miles" (Carlsson-Kanyama 1997) saved by their garden production.⁶ They have participated in composting workshops and in collecting data for the soc project. Some gardeners attended several annual "Seedy Saturday" seed exchanges organized by the Toronto Community Garden Network. Seedy Saturdays, held across Canada, are community events started by Seeds of Diversity Canada to promote backyard seed saving and to encourage seed exchange among gardeners (see [<http://www.seeds.ca>]). But when the Chinese seniors did not like the selection of seeds available they stopped attending the event. Seedy Saturday invites organic or sustainable seed companies and environmental and gardening-related organizations to display their wares, and all of the information is in English, so the format is alienating for non-English-speaking people. The Frances Beavis gardeners' experience at Seedy Saturday is an example of the cultural barriers faced by many of Toronto's community gardeners who might, but do not, participate in the NGO-organized gardening events. Although the Frances Beavis garden is downtown, it is very difficult for the elderly gardeners to travel to other parts of the city. For gardeners in more distant locations—such as those from Shamba and Riverside—these geographical barriers are even greater. Many gardeners participated in the soc events only when transportation was provided. Translation was provided by FoodShare for the soc events, but most of the city's gardening events do not offer translation

because of budgetary constraints. Gardeners who do not speak or read English cannot find out about these events, much less participate in them. The interaction between the Chinese senior gardeners at Frances Beavis and the NGOs takes place with translators and is difficult to organize. Transportation and language were identified as two of the greatest barriers to participation in gardening, as well as to other CFS activities and events. The NGOs persist with their outreach to the gardeners, because it is part of their strategy to involve more ethnocultural groups in the CFS movement, and try to adapt their programing to meet the needs of those groups.

SHAMBA COMMUNITY GARDEN

Anan Lololi, coordinator of the Afri-Can FoodBasket, chose the name "Shamba" for a new community garden in his backyard (Figure 6) because it reflects the Africa-centered focus of the organization's activities. "We have a lot of people from continental Africa who participate in the gardens, and a lot of people from the diaspora. We want to make sure people from the diaspora can relate to the Afri-Can FoodBasket. If they speak Swahili, they know that Shamba is field or garden." Started ten years ago as a small space in a suburban backyard, the garden has expanded to grow food for the many volunteers who spend time in the garden, as well as for a fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-buying club the organization coordinates for African Canadians.

Over the three years of the soc project, the backyard garden became an integral part of the Afri-Can FoodBasket's program to support new immigrants in the Jane and Wilson neighborhood in Toronto, a community that struggles with the challenges of high levels of unemployment and crime. At first the garden program attracted volunteers from the African Canadian community. As the organization's reputation in the community grew, volunteers representing the ethnocultural diversity of Toronto's new immigrants flocked to participate in the program. As Lololi (2001) describes the garden and its volunteers,

We've got a really nice collection of people from all over the world. We learn as much from these volunteers as they learn from us. We help them in different ways to cope. They are mostly refugees, or out of a job. The garden is therapeutic. It's a nice energy. People from all over different parts of the world. They meet, usually have the same problems, so they have a connection, they have a common understanding of what they have to face in this new country. We are trying something different. We grow together, then we share the food together. The garlic, celery, parsley, peppers, and onions are planted in bulk in all the gardens, harvested, and put in the Afri-Can FoodBasket so people have the experience of eating organic.

The Afri-Can FoodBasket is involved with more than seven gardens in the Jane and Wilson neighborhood and has developed a program that supports recent immigrants from a number of countries. Applying and adapting food-security goals to meet the needs of Toronto's immigrant community, the Afri-Can FoodBasket is an innovative and important organization in Toronto's food-security network.



FIG. 6—Anan Lololi in the Shamba Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by Jin Huh, summer 2002; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

An exciting feature of the Shamba garden is its experimental component. Crops such as eddoe (taro), Jamaican pumpkin, sweet potato, and okra are grown to demonstrate how some tropical foods can be locally adapted (Figure 7). The Afri-Can FoodBasket is interested in the concept of import substitution and each year tries new varieties and gardening methods that increase the diversity of locally grown produce. The Afri-Can FoodBasket is learning what crops grow well in Toronto's climate, using the volunteers' farming experience to try new production methods. These methods have even been shared with local farmers who are interested in growing food for the ever-expanding ethno-cultural communities in the city.

The volunteers at the Shamba garden have varying levels of gardening expertise. One volunteer, a recent arrival from Poland with extensive experience, managed the garden's composting facility. Three Nigerian men who had been in Canada less than a year were interviewed about their gardening experience in Africa. They stated that they did not have any previ-



FIG. 7—Seeds of Our City gardeners on tour at the Shamba Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by the author, summer 2001; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

ous gardening experience, although further questioning revealed that all three came from families who had farms within 5 kilometers of the urban center in which they had lived. But these young men had boarded in the city with relatives in order to attend school, while their parents managed the farms. At Shamba they were gardening for the first time, using the gardening program to gain Canadian volunteer experience, meet other new Canadians, and obtain access to fresh food through the Afri-Can FoodBasket. Food-systems education is central to the Afri-Can FoodBasket's program for new immigrants. Participants learn about gardening and the benefits of eating locally and organically and are introduced to other food programs in the city. The participation of the Afri-Can FoodBasket in the local, national, and North American cfs movement has meant an increased awareness of the importance of culturally appropriate food in diverse cities like Toronto.

RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Riverside Community Garden is an interesting example of the unlikely players involved in community gardening in Toronto. Located in the northwestern corner of the city in a suburban neighborhood, the Riverside Apartments are owned by a large building-management company. The neighborhood is one of the fastest-growing, most densely populated areas in the city. It has Toronto's highest level of new immigrants, and the unemployment rate is also high. Very few social services and amenities, such as grocery stores, exist in the community, and residents travel far to shop for food and other basic necessities.

The Riverside Community Garden was started in 1999 when Greenest City and the Riverside Apartments management company came together to establish a community garden. For the first three years members of the Greenest City staff worked closely with garden-committee members to organize the community and plan the garden, acting as a liaison between the residents and the building manager, Michael Ramdharry. Ramdharry, the community relations and activities director for the Riverside Apartments, states that working with a local NGO to install the garden has been an important part of the company's strategy to keep the building's grounds neat and its residents happy (Ramdharry 2000).

Although the idea for the garden originated with the property-management group, with encouragement and support from a local NGO, it is the residents who have transformed the once-bleak urban landscape surrounding their apartment building (Figure 8). Members of the garden committee articulate how the garden became a starting place for making their apartment building more livable, for providing additional recreational opportunities for residents, and for bringing tenants from diverse cultural backgrounds together.

Most of the Sri Lankan gardeners at the Riverside Community Garden (Figure 9) have previous agricultural experience. Over the three years of the soc project, the garden doubled in size, and the diversity of plants increased substantially to reflect the gardeners' cultural backgrounds and culinary preferences. The first year the gardeners grew seedlings from a local garden center—cabbage, tomatoes, pep-

pers, and eggplant. By the third year many more herbs, greens, and vegetables were found in the gardens, including jute, sweet potato spinach (the edible leaves of the common sweet potato), entsai (also known as “water spinach”), Vietnamese celery, hot peppers, white egg eggplant, and bitter melon. When asked where the seeds for these plants came from, the gardeners responded that they were either purchased at ethnocultural grocery stores or sent from “home”—primarily Sri Lanka. These varieties were shared between Sri Lankan and Caribbean gardeners.

In fact, many of the varieties found in the three soc gardens were shared among gardeners of different ethnocultural backgrounds. Amaranth and callaloo are an interesting example of this. Grown in all three gardens, the African Canadian, Caribbean, Chinese, and Sri Lankan gardeners used different parts of the plant—young shoots, mature leaves, seeds—in their cooking and provided recipes for the final soc project report. During garden tours, which always ended with a meal, gardeners exclaimed over the different varieties in the gardens and exchanged callaloo recipes.

Tenants at Riverside are clear about the benefits of the garden at their apartment building. Saras Nadarasa and Merline Miles tell a story of how they used to pass each other in the lobby of the Riverside Apartments without so much as a smile. Since the community garden was started, Nadarasa and Miles have shared recipes, gardening tips, and a new friendship. Another gardener from Riverside stated, “It’s therapy, you feel good inside to see the garden bearing fruit. I savor the communal aspect of being involved in a community garden.” Along with new friendships, however, the project reveals the complexity of social relationships in this diverse community. For example, Sri Lankan gardeners formed the majority of people on the garden committee, creating tension between themselves and non-Tamil residents. In addition, lack of communication between the gardeners and the property-management group has led to assumptions about who will do what in relation to the garden and how the garden will be managed on a seasonal basis. Greenest City played a role in mediating these conflicts and assisted the gardeners with the development of the protocols and rules that now guide the gardeners. These conflicts between residents, between residents and management, and among residents, management, and the supporting NGO illustrate the challenges of cross-cultural organizing. Language is not the only hindrance in mediating conflicts; cultural, racial, and gendered conceptions of community participation are also barriers (Baker and Huh 2003).

For the property-management company, the purpose of the garden extends beyond the social benefits articulated by the tenant gardeners.

The garden is an investment, not just a physical investment, but a social one as well. We promote the garden as a service that has been designed to enhance the quality of living at the Oaks [Riverside], and to make us stand out from other properties. If someone is choosing between living in one apartment or the next, here’s something we have that’s considered a value-added asset to living here. It not only beautifies the landscape and physically benefits the property, but it benefits the lives of the people living here and that’s an asset in itself. (Ramdharry 2000)



FIG. 8—An aerial view of the suburban landscape and gardens at the Riverside Apartments, Toronto. (Photograph by Alejandra Galvez, summer 2001; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)



FIG. 9—The gardeners at the Riverside Community Garden, Toronto. (Photograph by the author, summer 2001; reproduced courtesy of FoodShare Toronto)

Ramdharry identifies several reasons why it is beneficial for the property-management company to have a community garden on-site: Tenants feel connected to the property; vandalism and property maintenance costs have dropped; vacancy rates are low because people want to stay longer and are attracted to the apartments; and fewer social problems arise because people know each other and seem to be able to resolve conflicts more easily. For Ramdharry, the garden is an investment as well as a strategy for managing the property more effectively. He has also implemented other innovative management ideas, initiatives driven by the residents, facilitated by staff, and paid for by the property-management company. These include installing a play structure for the children of residents and organizing a means of transporting tenants to faraway grocery stores. Not only have these initiatives benefited the management company financially, they have also created a process of engagement for the tenants, encouraging them to take an active role in the transformation of the space surrounding their apartments. The tenants, now part of a strong and vocal residents' committee, are able to advocate for other changes to improve their living situation. Through the garden they have access to the property's management structure and can challenge dominant social and economic relationships.

FROM CONSUMERS TO "SOIL CITIZENS"

The above examples offer a glimpse into the sociocultural and geopolitical meanings imbued in community-garden landscapes. Immigrant gardeners in Toronto are drawn into the politics of their gardens, as well as the broader CFS movement through the act of planting, tending, and harvesting their garden produce. The landscapes they create offer avenues for participation in the transformation of the food system, and their activity embodies the values needed for this transformation. The importance of access to culturally appropriate food for these new Canadian communities is highlighted through their garden work, as are the challenges and barriers to their participation in the CFS movement.

Food citizenship involves the practice of food-system localization, as well as the embodiment of values of caring for the community and the environment. These practices and values are slowly being written into municipal policy. When the municipal Food and Hunger Action Committee toured community food projects in 2001 to make food-related policy recommendations to the city of Toronto, several community gardens were visited. The gardeners and gardens so impressed the municipal councilors that several recommendations to support and facilitate the creation of community gardens were included in the final report (City of Toronto 2001).⁷

The soc project has provided an opportunity to reflect on how local, place-based movements infuse the landscape with multiple meanings and expand notions of citizenship to democratic, community-based practices beyond the rights defined by government. The Frances Beavis, Shamba, and Riverside Community Gardens are places where the politics of everyday life play out at various levels, and they are examples of how the social environment is intricately intertwined with the

natural environment. Gardeners, through their gardening activity, become engaged in organizing, planning, and planting their small plots with other gardeners and residents as well as local NGOs working on broader CFS goals. A simple cultural and neighborhood-based endeavor has rapidly evolved into a political project as individuals have come together to gain access to land, find appropriate resources (material and financial), and mobilize their communities. The gardens are examples of how groups of typically marginalized citizens—immigrants and people living on low incomes—use their neighborhood as a means of resistance, asserting their identity to reclaim space and engage in projects of citizenship. With time, this network of gardeners, NGOs, municipal staff, building managers, and other unlikely players expands to form a topography of alternative urban landscapes through which people's perceptions of the environment and their role as citizens is transformed (Katz 2003, 264).

The Frances Beavis, Shamba, and Riverside Community Gardens not only reflect Toronto's thriving social and cultural pluralism but also illustrate how groups, marginalized from the formal political process, can both produce and contest space through the assertion of their cultural identity. In the gardens, cultural diversity becomes connected to biodiversity, demonstrating how urban green space is infused with the cultural and political. The soc project, simultaneously an effort to create, document, and preserve cultural and political space for gardeners, is an example of how a commitment to "food citizenship" can lead to a transformation of the urban landscape and the food system.

NOTES

1. Toronto's strategy for addressing food issues at the municipal level can be found in *The Growing Season* (City of Toronto 2001).

2. Interesting reflections on the official planning process in Toronto are given by Wekerle (2002), who bemoans the absence of any reference to community gardening in the first draft of Toronto's *Official Plan*. In a subsequent article (2004) she documents the process whereby CFS issues were finally included.

3. Conversations with Liette Gilbert, Ilan Kapoor, and Deborah Barndt from the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University helped me to articulate these ideas about "food citizenship."

4. From 1999 until 2002 I coordinated FoodShare's Urban Agriculture Program and the Seeds of Our City project, overseeing the project design, bringing together key partners, working directly with the gardeners, and writing the final report. The methodology used to develop the soc case studies was collaboratively shaped by the project's steering committee, which comprised FoodShare staff and four NGO partners (Greenest City, Afri-Can FoodBasket, Toronto Environmental Alliance, and Sustainable Toronto), a planner from the Toronto Food Policy Council, a professor from a local university, and several gardeners. Using community-based and participatory-research methods, these people participated in the project's design and implementation and in the development of the methods by which the information was collected. Gardeners were an integral part of the process, consulted with and involved on an ongoing basis. The soc project, generously funded for three years by the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation Urban Issues Program, builds on the work of Gerda Wekerle, who collected stories from and documented the gardens of immigrant gardeners in Toronto, research that focused on ethnocultural gardening traditions and the contribution of immigrant gardens to the Toronto landscape.

5. For a discussion of the barriers and lessons learned by the partnering NGOs through the soc project process, see Baker and Huh (2003).

6. This project was part of Greenest City's Multicultural Greening Project (see [<http://www.greenestcity.net>]).

7. Thanks to Nick Saul, executive director of The Stop Community Food Centre (see [<http://www.thestop.org/>]), for this observation.

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