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Glean Hudson valley: Aligning abundance and scarcity for a just and equitable food system

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A thorough analysis of the history of “gleaning” exposes underlying discussions about moral obligations to the poor and hungry, the role of government in land management and agricultural production, the drastic separation between food production and consumption, leading causes behind food insecurity, and market pressures that drive overproduction and cosmetic standards that lead to food waste. These issues are well illustrated the Hudson Valley where an incredible bounty of fresh, local produce and dairy is juxtaposed with rising impoverished, unemployed, and food insecure populations. A growing network of gleaning programs has already taken shape in Orange, Ulster, and Columbia Counties gathering leftover food from farms and distributing it to various emergency food aid agencies. It used to be that poor or unemployed would go directly into the fields to glean. Nowadays, disenfranchised hardly have access to grocery stores, let alone agricultural fields. Government policies provide food stamps and WIC (women infants and children) benefits, but these provisions, like the entire food system, are disjointed. The logical matching of food abundance and food scarcity is going to require the integration of farmers and urban residents, policy and community initiatives, job creation and food recovery, institution and city, youth and elderly, men and women. This project attempts to establish the foundation for a gleaning network in the Hudson Valley by beginning a “gleaning database” that provides information not only about available excess food, but also about food scarcity and inequitable access. By visualizing the disconnections between food production and food consumption and the many steps in between, the injustices of food access take on new meaning; they demand changes in the current food system, but they also acknowledge that reassessing, reconfiguring, and reconnecting existing regional assets—from farmers to food outlets to institutions to local community members—could catalyze those changes.

Biography

Evelina Knodel is an Architect and urban designer currently working at the Hudson Valley Design Lab in Poughkeepsie, NY, a satellite office of the architecture firm, MASS Design Group. She has received her Bachelor's degree in Architecture from University of Minnesota and her Master's in Architecture and Urban Design from Columbia University. Her passion lies in just and equitable food systems, understanding that food is a primary cultural and social integrator that takes place at many different scales and in varying contexts. Though it is a necessity, equitable access to food is confounded by large and complex systems that are difficult, though not impossible, to change. Her career in design has led her to appreciate the power of visualization and community engagement to prompt unique perspectives and catalyze change on many levels. She has been conducting research in the Hudson Valley into the concept of gleaning networks and is excited about the dialogues and opportunities it unleashes.

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