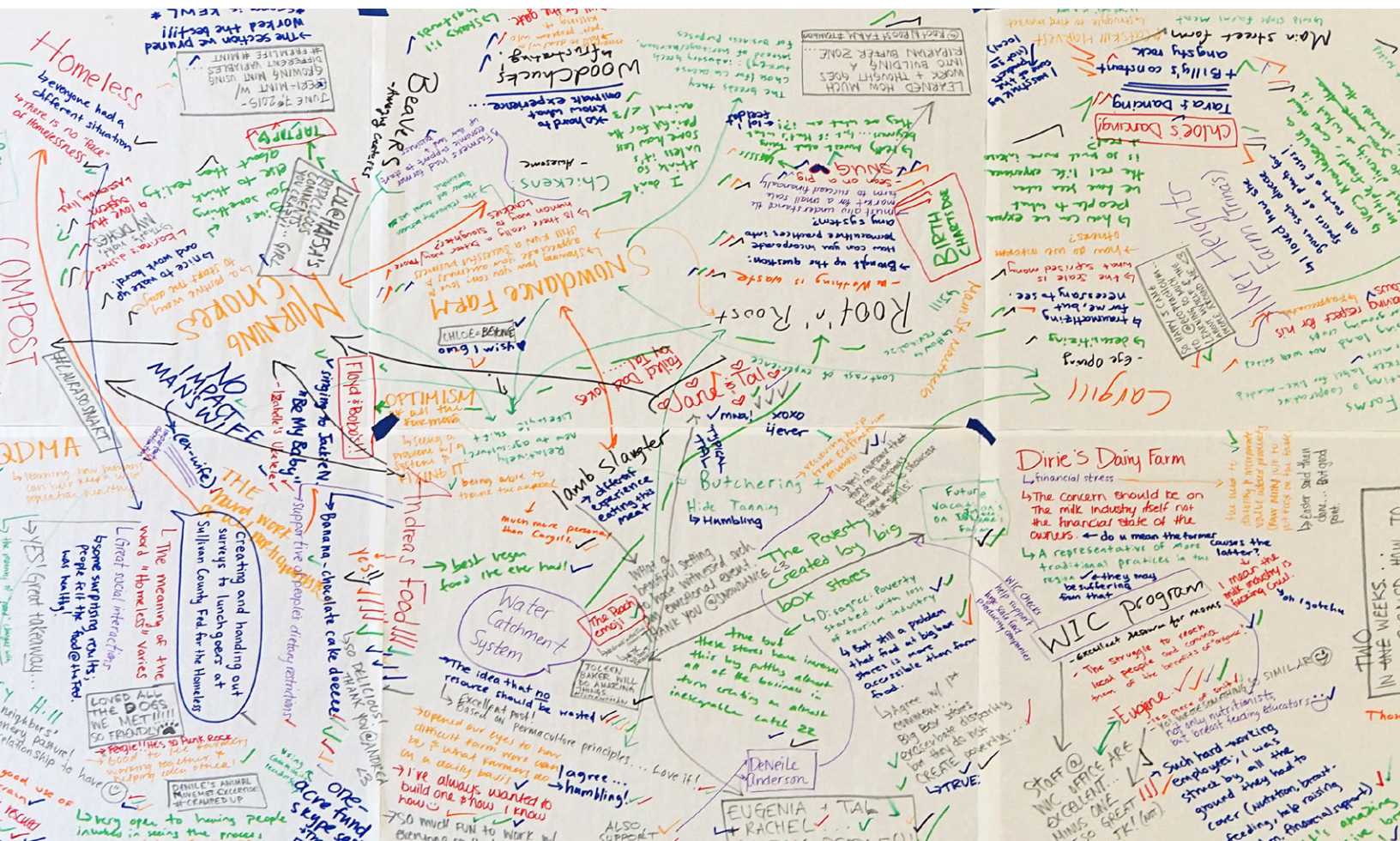




# REIMAG(IN)ING THE REGION OF THE 22ND CENTURY

# ECO PRACTICUM CATSKILLS SESSION ONE FINAL PROJECTS, 2015

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

**The environmental movement needs visionary leaders.** Blinded by fears of climate catastrophe and the end of life as we know it, consumers rush to malls around the world, anxious to spend their worries away. Environmentalists suffer from uncertainty, too. If our system is unsustainable, why do we find it so hard to imagine alternatives? We are lacking popular visionary proposals for a new future for our civilization. Addressing this is the great challenge of our era and today's leaders need to seize this opportunity.

**Leadership doesn't mean knowing all the answers.** This is certainly true today in the environmental movement, where problems require complex and patient solutions.

Instead, leaders today need to know how to ask great questions – ones that challenge our assumptions and presuppose solutions in line with our deepest values. Great questions can generate constructive dialogue and even motivate action. Sometimes the answers don't even matter that much, so long as the questions can stimulate passions and interests, and lead to better approaches.

Session One of Eco Practicum Catskills 2015 focused on foodshed resilience and food justice, as well as the value and treatment of animals in agriculture. We began our final project with a workshop to address the art of questioning, with three groups crafting one question for

each issue area. I'm proud of the thought they invested. It took hours of discussions and even argument to settle on a question that addressed the varied interests and concerns of each member. This challenging consensus-building process ultimately made their questions even stronger, and offered participants a chance to practice group skills that are strangely absent from many formal learning settings, despite being vital to almost every profession.

Armed with excellent questions, they took a shot at answering them. They first pored over photos taken during the program and chose nine to help them illustrate their points. They also prepared written

statements. The photos and statements are both reproduced in this booklet. These final projects were presented to peers, programmatic partners, and the staff of Eco Practicum. Each presentation sparked engaging conversations and additional questions that will help guide future inquiry.

These in-person discussions are not represented in this booklet. Also missing here are representations of the transformative educational experience they each underwent during the program, transformations that are deeply personal and that, we hope, they carry with them to their universities and beyond.

- TAL BEERY  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR





## WHAT THREE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES WILL BE MOST SUCCESSFUL IN RESTORING AND MAINTAINING ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONALITY (IN AN AGRICULTURAL SETTING) IN THE CATSKILLS IN THE 22ND CENTURY?



Allison Chan  
Audre May  
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**GOAL:** We think agricultural systems that function like ecosystems are the most desirable and will contribute most effectively to the Catskill region in the future. This means that farms will have more diverse and interdependent parts, and thus be more stable for the land and the farmers in the long run.

**HOW WE CAN GET THERE:** We focused on three methods we saw throughout this session – the use of rotating animals, the use of compost, and the diversification of farms – to accomplish this goal.

### ROTATING ANIMALS

As it stands, many farms are still using fossil fuel-powered machinery to do the physical work, which means that the system relies on inputs from far beyond its own reaches.

Animals, which can live off of outputs from the farm system, can replace these input and at the same time provide many other services. They can act as tillers, lawn-mowers, pest removers, fertilizers, etc. Since one rarely sees an ecosystem without animals (or with solely animals) agricultural systems should find that same balance for raising and using them as one part of a whole. We saw examples of this at Root n' Roost and Channery Hill farms.

Alternatively, some land is too degraded, hilly, and/or poorly suited to machinery and crop cultivation. This land can be reclaimed and made to be productive by rotating animals on the land, which provides an output of meat while increasing the health of the system. We saw an example of this at Slope Farms; the pasture land has significantly increased in health and diversity of grass species since rotational grazing began.

### COMPOSTING

Composting is a mechanism for keeping nutrients (that might otherwise be thrown out as waste) within the system. It mirrors the cycle of decay and release found in any ecosystem, and should thus act as an important part of an agricultural system.

An effective compost pile needs 30 parts carbon (in the form of dried leaves, hay, and other yard trimmings) to 1 part nitrogen (in the form of food scraps and green yard trimmings), 50% water moisture, aeration, and temperatures of about 90–140°F. All of this creates an environment conducive to the cultivation of the desired microbes which speed up the decomposition process to a time scale useful to farmers.

The output of this is a material rich in organic matter, which can be added to the soil to supplement its health and nutrients, thus reducing or eliminating the need for fertilizer inputs into the system.

Compost can also help to feed animals; for example, chickens can pick through for insect larvae and

desirable food scraps.

### DIVERSIFICATION

Many farms in the Catskills region were monoculture dairies, but this type of farm has been in decline. It is difficult to make a profit with prices fluctuating (and mostly falling) while costs continue to rise. Monocultures are, in the long run, not likely to produce stability.

We learned about this firsthand from the Dirie family of Dirie's dairy. In recent years, they have been trying to stabilize their income by diversifying what they sell – raw milk from their own cows, and maple syrup and honey from their neighbors. We decided to explore this idea of diversity further, since one rarely sees an ecosystem dominated by only one type of productivity.

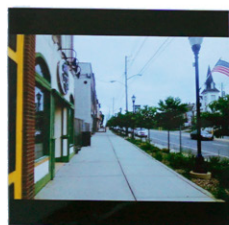
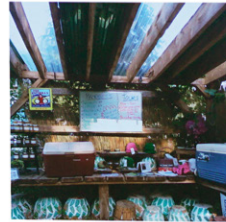
Diversity of agricultural outputs is one facet of this idea. If farms have more types of crops, they will have a higher chance of weathering unpredictable stressors (both physical and economic). If one crop fails, another may still survive. We also feel that agricultural products do not have to be solely food objects. They can include educational aspects, such as tours, classes, internships, and workshops.

Genetic diversity is another side to this. By growing different varieties and cultivars of the same plant in tandem, pests and diseases are less likely to cause as much damage as in a monoculture, simply because they are less likely to find multiple host plants in close proximity. In addition, one can use varieties, especially heirloom varieties, that are especially suited to the region (cold tolerant and hardy). These varieties will require less input and care than others. Silver Heights Nursery is an example of finding, growing, and selling such varieties of plants.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:** These three practices will likely necessitate farms that are relatively small, for which the market is currently problematic; prices for such agricultural products are higher than what one finds in a supermarket, which means that such farms are supported more by restaurants and consumers of higher income than by the general populace or chain stores. In addition, such farms do not have the extensive distribution networks that come with larger scale farms. Solving this problem will require community solidarity and innovation, and new marketing strategies (for example, the Slope Farms label is a cooperative of several farmers that work together to produce and sell the same product, thereby reaching a scale of production and stability that could not be achieved by any one farmer in that cooperative). If this economic structure can be properly implemented, then we believe that agricultural ecosystems have great potential to restore and revitalize farming in the Catskills.



## HOW CAN WE MAKE FRESH, LOCALLY-SOURCED PRODUCE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS IN THE CATSKILLS REGION OF THE 22ND CENTURY?



Chloe Kunstler  
Hafsa Sabri  
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William Dimas

### INTRO: BILLY

Today we are going to talk about ways in which we can make locally-sourced produce accessible and affordable to people of all socio-economic backgrounds in the Catskills in the 22nd century.

The way we see it, there is not enough sustainable education and policies that ensure people's ability to harvest and consume healthy foods.

Through these examples, we will outline ways in which we believe people can adopt practices that ensure healthy food consumption.

We had the opportunity to speak with Evan Axelrad at OneAcreFund. He explained to us that food security centers around four principles: Availability, Access, Utilization, and Stability.

In recognizing that foreign countries were food-insecure, the US developed Food Aid policies. The US's strategy was to send huge grain surpluses to African countries. The problem with this, Evan highlighted, is that it served as a quick fix; citizens of these countries were not learning to sustain themselves. A more long-term solution, Evan proposed, is to educate farmers in these regions to learn how to provide for themselves for years to come. Today, we are applying these fundamental concepts to our ideas for how people of all backgrounds may gain access to healthy, locally-sourced food in the 22nd century Catskill region.

### PRE-EXISTING PROGRAMS: CHLOE

For the sake of our presentation's time limit, we are using two examples of organizations that are instrumental in providing low-income communities with healthy food.

Our first example is WIC. Standing for Women, Infants, and Children, WIC is a Nutritional Program for families with young children, funded by the USDA. WIC does an amazing job of checking with families and ensuring that they have the information and resources they need to supplement their grocery shopping with healthy foods. We found that the office in Sullivan County is especially focused on promoting breastfeeding, and encouraging mothers to buy fruits and vegetables. While the office does a terrific job of promoting healthy eating and providing financial assistance, there are a few opportunities for improvement in the WIC program that can increase clients' access to locally-sourced and fresh food.

### KARINA

We had the opportunity to discuss with the WIC staff about what barriers prevent clients from accessing healthy food options. Transportation and convenience were factors that came up multiple times and we discussed possible solutions.

In addition to that discussion we suggest some other changes that could be implemented within the WIC program. Changes would need to be applied at the federal level but our recommendations stem from our experiences so far in the Catskill region.

For one, we suggest permitting organic foods to

be purchased by clients, with WIC allowances. This would open up the opportunity for clients to choose to buy products without pesticides, which is ideal for families with young children that the WIC program serves.

Secondly, not only can WIC checks go towards food, but there is also potential to allow for the buying of seeds for growing food. Seeds could be given out in conjunction with information on use, providing more opportunity for locally sourced food.

Third, there is potential for redistribution of funds for additional money to be allotted for shopping at farmer's markets, and these checks could be administered more frequently than just once a year. We believe it would be helpful for clients to receive an adequate amount of money for each season.

Lastly, the WIC program in Sullivan County has created a garden behind its office. The garden serves as an opportunity for clients to go outside and experience growing food, learning skills that could then bring to their own living situations. Assistance and on-going guidance could be provided to help clients establish a growing space, and in best practices for managing said space.

With more consistent maintenance and upkeep, with the help of WIC consumers, the garden can serve as an educational tool.

### SULLIVAN COUNTY: HAFSA

Sullivan County Federation for the Homeless is a local non-profit organization that provides prepared meals and packaged foods for those in need.

We visited the Federation and had the opportunity to interact with clients about their experiences and received feedback on their food preferences. David, a local volunteer who has a great deal of experience in non-profit social services, is maintaining the garden behind the Federation. At the moment, the garden's aim is to provide the kitchen with produce.

Recent federal grants have allowed the Federation to provide produce for its clients. With this resource, clients can increase their own intakes of fresh fruits and vegetables.

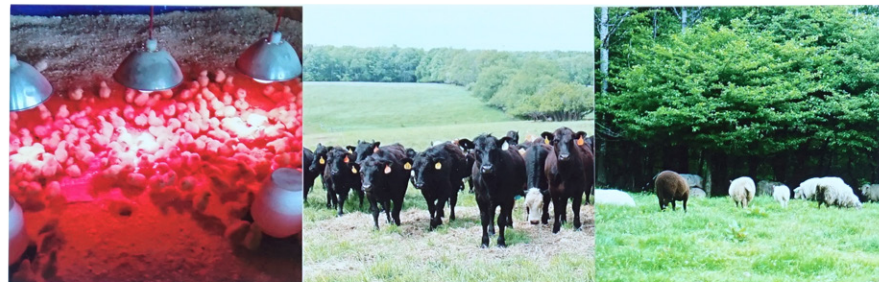
However, the garden can be used even more effectively and sustainably. With more client participation and upkeep, the garden can provide a great deal of produce for the kitchen, so that instead of canned vegetables, fresh produced can be served to clients. In addition, the garden can be used to get the clients interested in the act of gardening, so that they can hopefully translate their experience into their everyday lifestyles.

### CHLOE

In the 22nd century, we hope that organizations like the Federation for the Homeless and WIC will give away produce instead of processed goods and show its clients that they too can grow their own healthy, locally-sourced food. These practices will be a great supplement to pre-existing forms of food support in the Catskill region.



## HOW DO WE ATTAIN A PERSONALIZED SELF-SUSTAINING SYSTEM WHERE FAMILIES ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ANIMAL PRODUCTS USED IN THEIR HOMES TO ENSURE THE RESPECTFUL TREATMENT OF THE ANIMALS?



Izabelle Lawston  
Maheteme Kebede  
Tara Bonn

### CURRENT SITUATION

#### DISCONNECT

There is a disconnection between people and their food, it is often the case that we have no idea where our food comes from, specifically meat, how it was raised and what it was fed.

#### ANIMAL WELFARE IS AN AFTERTHOUGHT

Large scale factory farming is not only unethical, but it is unsustainable. With such a high demand, efficiency and profit are bigger concerns than animal welfare which puts the animal's well-being at risk.

### REGION OF THE 22ND CENTURY

#### PERSONALIZED:

Raising animals yourself or having direct contact with the farmer changing health regulations to allow farmers to slaughter and butcher their own animals and legally sell to the community. Cutting out the middle man. In order to fund this, laws would change to benefit the small scale farmers by giving out subsidies.

#### SELF-SUSTAINING:

Creating a system in which one can be completely sustained by their own land or local community. The way the animals are raised will allow for multiple purposes by the animal that are in sync with a permaculture design. For example pigs tilling the

land, ducks uprooting weeds, chickens eating pests, all which create manure for the land to thrive on. On the community level a system of bartering would create an unmonetized food system.

#### KNOWLEDGEABLE/RESPONSIBLE:

We will integrate this design into the school system by educating students from a young age on the environmental importance and role of these animals and by connecting students to animals and the land. Like eco-practicum there would be school programs that bring people to a large scale factory farming processing plant and also to an intimate slaughter by a farmer and his lamb. Make people aware of their role and relationship with animals. This responsibility comes from knowledge.

#### RESPECTFUL:

Respect for the animal would be built by considering the physical and emotional needs of the animal. This would be done by giving them a comfortable space to live in whichever environment they are best suited for. Another important aspect would be feeding animals to their dietary constants ie not feeding cows corn. This includes in life and in death, in which the slaughter of an animal should be an intimate respectful process where it is not mechanized and where profit is not the main goal. There should also be an appreciation for the fact that you are taking a life for your own benefit. Those who eat meat should recognize that fact and be mindful of it.





