# *Edible Empires: Redesigning Power, Place, and Resilience in the US Food System*

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The US food system is plagued by the structural rigidity of centralised food distribution networks, crop monocultures, and unequal access to nutritious foods — all issues that disproportionately affect marginalised communities. These challenges are only worsened by colonial legacies that prioritise price, profit, and efficiency over sustainability. To address these problems, a fundamental rethinking of how food systems are structured and managed is essential.

This paper examines the US food system through a postcolonial lens, arguing that decolonising food infrastructure is vital for fostering a more resilient and sustainable future in the US. Utilising the concept of *disenclosure* as introduced by Jean-Luc Nancy[1] and further developed by Achille Mbembe,[2] this paper defines the term as the process of dismantling spatial and ideological constructs that maintain colonial and capitalist control over resources, including food. In this context, disenclosure requires constructing new forms of regional autonomy and fair resource distribution. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to contribute academically to the discourse on decolonisation and (2) to advocate for practical architectural interventions that can facilitate resilient futures. By bridging theory and practice, the paper provides a framework for reimagining food infrastructure in ways that disrupt colonial power dynamics and introduce new modes of architectural practice.

This paper focuses on a singular, overarching inquiry: What role could architects play in reimagining the deeply colonial and fragile US food system? This central question is explored through the structure of four sub-questions, each contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the subject:

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1 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (Fordham University Press, 2008).

2 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

a. How do theorists conceptualise decolonisation within the built environment?
b. How is the US food system colonial, and what does this imply?
c. What are the spatial dynamics of the food system, and how does it relate to colonialism?
d. What unique contributions can architects make in reimagining food systems?

The essay also provides specific architectural case studies to stretch the boundaries of the profession and create decentralised, contextually appropriate food systems. For practitioners, in particular architects and urban planners, the paper provides actionable insights into how they might contribute to the future of the US foodscape. And, for theorists, it offers a critical perspective on how built environments reflect and perpetuate power dynamics. The paper advocates shifting from top-down, centralised models towards more regionalised, resilient approaches that prioritise positive health, environmental, and economic futures.

*Theoretical Perspectives on Colonisation in the Foodscape*

Understanding the structural fragility of the US food system leads to an interrogation of the incentive structures driving myopic decision-making. While often expressed in the context of world conquest, colonial strategies produce results that often outlast the coloniser. These expressions of aimless dominion fundamentally alter the physical, spiritual, cultural, and systemic construction of our collective future. Building on the views of theorists Jean-Luc Nancy and Achille Mbembe, colonial ideals thrive in consolidated, prideful, short-sighted cultures, and do not welcome diversity. Therefore, these same philosophies unsurprisingly become embedded in the physical landscape over time. In

this way, food systems become more than value-stream arenas for land stewardship. Instead, physical and social landscapes become *terra firma*: where control, exclusion, and exploitation are continually reproduced.

In Nancy's philosophy of 'disenclosure', he suggests that the world should not be reduced to a single logic or order, but instead remain open to diverse possibilities. This perspective encourages moving beyond rigid, uniform systems that enforce control, advocating for resilient methods of food production and distribution. Mbembe builds on this idea by highlighting how colonial and capitalist systems create 'enclosures' that restrict autonomy and perpetuate inequalities.[3] In food systems, these enclosures manifest as centralised, large-scale agricultural practices that prioritise prices for end-consumers and undermine health, ecological, and cultural outcomes.

While the goal of optimising food systems for price and efficiency after World War II was driven by a desire to ensure food security and economic growth, this approach has had unintended consequences. In practical terms, supply-chain decisions over time led to the concentration of land and resources in the hands of a few, the marginalisation of indigenous and local food practices, and the imposition of monocultures that erode biodiversity and cultural diversity. Evidently, the focus on cost efficiency did not fully account for long-term externalities. These hidden costs are now borne by society through adverse health outcomes, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and environmental damage. What were once considered solutions to immediate postwar needs have become problems of their own, underscoring the need to rebalance the scales for the benefit of all. Thus, addressing these challenges today requires more than just a focus on equity; we also need to consider building resilience and ensuring the longevity of food systems for future generations.

By applying these decolonial critiques to the US food system, we can see the deep-rooted inequalities and power

3 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

imbalances that shape food production, distribution, and consumption. The centralisation of food infrastructure — from vast industrial farms to distribution networks controlled by a few multinational corporations — mirrors the colonial model of extraction and exploitation. Reimagining food systems involves more than merely redistributing land or resources; it necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the spatial and economic logics that prioritise short-sighted thinking over long-term resilience.[4]

Alternative models proposed by decolonial theorists focus on regional autonomy, economic opportunity, and ecological sustainability. For instance, the concept of food sovereignty emphasises the right of communities to control their access to food and agricultural resources. This approach challenges the hegemony of global supply chains and supports diverse, resilient food systems that align with ecological and cultural contexts.[5]

In *What We Owe the Future*, William MacAskill reminds readers of the vastness of our future and how human influence over it may be greater than expected.[6] He argues that the risk of not considering our long-term impact is far greater than the uncertainty in predicting the future. MacAskill suggests that while the far future is inherently uncertain, this uncertainty does not justify inaction. Instead, it makes it even more critical to engage in proactive, thoughtful planning. The concept of 'expected value' plays a crucial role here: by considering the potential high stakes of our actions, we recognise that the cost of neglecting long-term considerations could be catastrophic. This perspective underscores the importance of designing food systems with a long-term view — one that values sustainability and resilience over short-term efficiency — ensuring that they serve not only present needs but also the well-being of future

4 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

5 Walter D. Mignolo. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011); Mbembe, Necropolitics.

6 William MacAskill, *What We Owe the Future* (Basic Books, 2022).

generations.

Each of these frameworks introduced above encourages a shift towards more resilient, sustainable food systems that reflect diverse cultural practices. And, ultimately, this shift challenges architects, urban planners, and policymakers to rethink the design of the US foodscape and the broader socioeconomic systems that perpetuate inequalities.

*Scoping the Problems within the US Food Infrastructure*

From the materials we use and the zoning laws we enact to the building codes we enforce, the colonial underpinnings of the US food system have profound implications for the reshaping of cities, borders, and landscapes. For generations, food infrastructure has played a pivotal role in shaping human settlements, evolving from agrarian societies where proximity to farmland was critical, to contemporary knowledge economies where convenience and efficiency often take precedence. Fundamentally, the design of our built environment is tied to the accessibility of essential resources like food, water, and shelter.

However, along the way, US citizens experienced a tipping point where globalisation, car dependency, and population growth silently shaped development patterns and severed many communities from their traditional foodways, leaving them reliant on the food practices and consumption patterns imposed by a colonial legacy rather than those of their cultural heritage or local ecology.[7]

Wendell Berry, in his essay 'What Are People For?', argues that the industrialization of agriculture and the centralization of food production have led to a profound alienation of people from the land and from each other.[8] Berry critiques the reduction of

7 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1990); Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity.

8 Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (North Point Press, 1990).

humans to mere economic agents within a capitalist framework, which he believes strips away the deeper, more meaningful connections that people once had with their environments and communities. He suggests that this disconnection is not merely an ecological or economic issue but a fundamental crisis of culture and identity. Berry contends that as food systems became more industrialised and commodified, the essential human practices of farming, cooking, and sharing food were diminished to mere transactions, stripping away their roles as expressions of community, culture, and ecological stewardship. According to Berry, the focus of the industrial food system on efficiency and profit over care and sustainability has led to the degradation of local ecologies and the erosion of cultural knowledge tied to place and practice. He calls for a return to more localised, ecologically sound farming practices that reconnect people with their land, food, and each other, advocating for an agrarian model that sees humans as stewards of the earth rather than exploiters of resources. This argument challenges readers to reimagine food infrastructure not merely as a supply chain but as a community-centric system that honours ecological limits and cultural traditions.[9]

To illustrate the scale of the issue, consider that approximately 895 million acres in the U.S. are dedicated to agricultural use, accounting for about 40 percent of the nation's total land area.[10] Yet, much of this land is devoted to industrial farming practices characterised by large-scale monocultures, such as corn and soy, which are designed for maximum yield and profit rather than nutritional diversity or ecological sustainability.[11] This approach is not unique to the US: globally, around 75 percent of the world's food is produced from just twelve plant species and

9 Berry, *What Are People For?*.

10 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 'Major Land Uses', 2021.

11 Stephen W. Martinez, et al., 'Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues', *USDA Economic Research Service* (2010).

five animal species.[12] This alarming lack of biodiversity not only affects dietary health but also ties food production to specific regions and farming methods often incompatible with sustainable long-term practices.[13]

The current US food infrastructure — from co-packing and aggregation to distribution, warehousing, farming, and retail — is fundamentally shaped by centralised and exclusionary practices that reflect a colonial mindset. For example, observations in relation to this study have shown that most co-packing facilities today are optimised to serve large-scale producers, marginalising small, local farmers who cannot afford to use these services. This dynamic limits the availability of locally sourced, fresh food, reinforcing a system that prioritises large-scale, industrial agriculture over localised, diverse food production. Moreover, through discussions with farmers across the Midwestern United States and interactions with the USDA's Regional Food Business Centers, I have listened to countless stories legitimising the decline of small-scale canneries and production facilities. This reduction in small processing facilities means fewer opportunities for small farms to process their products locally, leading to increased dependency on large-scale processors and limiting the ability of communities to support diverse, localised food systems.

All of these factors further restrict food access in underserved regions, contributing to a food landscape dominated by only a few major corporations.[14] This infrastructure not only perpetuates unhealthy eating habits but also reinforces

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12 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 'The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture', 2019; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 'Agroecological and other innovative approaches: for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition', 2019.

13 Sara Usha Maillacheruvu, 'The Historical Determinants of Food Insecurity in Native Communities', *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* (4 October 2022).

14 Jessica Clendenning, Wolfram Dressler, and Carol Richards, 'Food Justice or Food Sovereignty? Understanding the Rise of Urban Food Movements in the USA', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 33.1 (2016), pp. 165–177.

economic inequalities by denying smaller, local food enterprises the opportunity to thrive. The focus of industrial farming on monocultures primarily aimed at export markets reduces local food diversity and contributes significantly to environmental degradation.[15] Small-scale and urban farmers, who could provide more diverse and locally adapted food options, often lack access to land and resources, further entrenching the inequities built into the system.[16]

Each of these spatial exclusions perpetuates cycles of poverty and food insecurity, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities.[17] Thus, the US food system's colonial characteristics are embedded not just in its historical roots but in its contemporary practices and policies, which continue to shape how food is produced, distributed, and consumed.

### *The Spatial Dynamics of the US Foodscape*

While exploring the US food system, it is essential to recognise that the problems are not just financial, technological, or legal — they are fundamentally spatial and ecological. These are adaptive problems that require systemic change and a fundamental rethinking of how spaces for food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are organised, accessed, and governed. Unlike technical problems, which can be solved with straightforward solutions or technological fixes, adaptive problems involve complex challenges that require shifts in values, beliefs, roles, and relationships. These decisions profoundly impact ecological health and societal resilience, all deeply tied to the historical patterns of colonialism and economic exploitation

15 Graham Gordon, 'Three Ways Colonialism Contributed to the Breakdown of Our Modern Food System', *CAFOD*, 29 September 2022 <https://cafod.org.uk/news/international-news/three-ways-colonialism-contributed-breakdown-food-system> [accessed 27 August 2024].

16 Sassen, *Expulsions*.

17 Craig Gundersen and James P. Ziliak, 'Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes', *Health Affairs*, 34.11 (2015), pp. 1830–1839.

that have shaped our current food landscape.[18]

However, many well-intentioned efforts to use architecture as a tool for change miss the mark because of a failure to grasp the complexity of these adaptive, spatial problems. Often, design interventions focus on aesthetic enhancements, agrotourism, or high-end urban farming projects that serve as green showcases rather than addressing the deep structural issues that plague the food system. These technical solutions can provide temporary relief or surface-level improvements but do not address the underlying, systemic issues that perpetuate food inequities and ecological harm. By prioritising spectacle over substance, these approaches can inadvertently reinforce inequalities, neglecting the needs of the communities most affected by food insecurity and failing to recognise the critical role that farmers and local food producers play in sustaining a resilient food system.

The real spatial challenge lies in understanding that design is not just about creating beautiful spaces; it is about rethinking how these spaces are financed, how they are accessed, and who benefits from them. It is about addressing the power dynamics that dictate land use and food distribution and ensuring that the spaces of the future are fair, resilient, and supportive of both ecological health and human well-being. This involves a shift from top-down, designer-developer-driven projects to more collaborative approaches that genuinely engage with farmers, community members, and other stakeholders directly involved in the food system.

One crucial aspect of this spatial rethinking is the integration of sustainable career pathways into the design of food systems. As Van Jones argues in *The Green Collar Economy*, creating 'green-collar' jobs — sustainable employment opportunities that contribute to environmental and social well-being — is key to building a more just and resilient economy.[19] In

18 Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2002).

19 Van Jones, *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems* (HarperOne, 2008).

the context of food systems, this means developing career paths that not only support farmers but also integrate them into broader spatial decisions about land use, urban planning, and ecological restoration. For instance, urban and peri-urban agriculture can be designed not just as a source of local food, but as a hub for green-collar jobs that offer living wages, health benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

However, achieving this requires moving beyond superficial design fixes. The creation of sustainable career pathways must be embedded in the spatial and ecological decisions that shape food systems. This could involve supporting the growth of mid-sized, regenerative farms too small to compete with industrial-scale operations. These farms play a critical role in bridging urban and rural food networks, providing local food while supporting biodiversity and soil health through regenerative practices. Investment in these 'missing middle' farms, particularly those on the fringes of cities, is a major lever for revitalising regional food systems and creating stable, rewarding jobs integrated into the local economy.[20]

Moreover, recognising the spatial problem in the food system also involves understanding where design can reinforce or dismantle existing inequalities. For example, while urban farms and community gardens are often celebrated for their potential to provide fresh produce in food-insecure neighbourhoods, they can also become catalysts of gentrification. Design interventions that focus solely on beautification without considering the socioeconomic context can drive up property values, displacing the very communities they were meant to serve. This highlights the importance of approaching design with a deep awareness of the spatial and social dynamics, ensuring that ownership and incentive structures are aligned with a future of shared resilience.

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20 Yuki Kato, 'Not Just the Price of Food: Challenges of an Urban Agriculture Organization in Engaging Local Residents', *Sociological Inquiry*, 89.3 (2019), pp. 400–425.

Ultimately, the spatial dimension of the food system involves more than just land use; it encompasses the broader question of how cities and corporations prioritise resilient agriculture. This requires a fundamental societal mindset shift in how we think about architecture — not merely as an aesthetic overlay but as a tool for systemic change.

### *The Role of Architecture and Design in Reimagining Food Systems*

As discussed, architects have a unique opportunity to engage with food systems by expanding their role beyond traditional building design to create interventions that push the boundaries of conventional architectural practice. By understanding the food system as an interconnected network of spaces and practices, architects can explore new mediums relevant to the projected circumstances. This line of thinking recognises that food infrastructure is not only about functional spaces but also about promoting sustainable practices and encouraging local economic development. Jeremy Till, in *Architecture Depends*, argues that architecture is inherently contingent, shaped by various social, economic, and environmental forces.[21] This perspective suggests that architects must be willing to engage with the complexities of food systems, recognising that design is not a standalone practice but one that is interwoven with broader societal issues.

Till further elaborates on this in *Spatial Agency*, coauthored with Nishat Awan and Tatjana Schneider, where he emphasises that architects must move beyond the 'heroic' model of architectural practice and instead adopt a more collaborative and flexible approach.[22] As we look towards 2050 or 2075, it is clear that the profession must evolve to engage with new and emerging fields. Architects will need to adapt to and collaborate

21 Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (MIT Press, 2009).

22 Jeremy Till, Nishat Awan, and Tatjana Schneider, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Routledge, 2011).

with experts across a range of disciplines. Fields like agro-environmental science will become critical as architects design spaces that support sustainable agriculture and enhance ecological resilience. Understanding the principles of biotechnology and synthetic biology will also be essential, as innovations in these fields offer new possibilities for designing adaptive, self-sustaining environments that can produce food locally and efficiently.

Additionally, architects will need to be conversant in industrial ecology to design closed-loop systems that integrate waste recycling, water management, and energy efficiency within food production spaces. The integration of machine learning and data analytics into architectural practice will also be indispensable. Architects will increasingly rely on big data to understand food distribution patterns, predict resource needs, and optimise the design of food infrastructure for resilience and adaptability. Collaboration with economists will also be crucial, as architects seek to understand the economic frameworks that underpin food systems and develop financially viable models for sustainable food production and distribution.

Till's notion of 'spatial agency' calls for a reimagining of the architect's role — one that is not limited to creating physical structures but extends to shaping social and economic frameworks through design.[23] Thus, the most significant innovations will not always emerge from the architectural drawing desk; they will come from expanding the boundaries of what architecture can achieve through collaboration, experimentation, and integration with other fields. This shift requires a fundamental rethinking of architectural education and practice, embracing a more fluid, dynamic approach that values systems thinking, ecological stewardship, and technological innovation as core competencies. By doing so, architects can play a vital role in shaping a more sustainable and resilient food system for the future.

23 Till, Awan, and Schneider, *Spatial Agency*.

While the future trajectory of the profession is certainly worth critiquing, looking back to historical and Indigenous knowledge systems provides architects with a wealth of strategies that could be adapted to contemporary contexts. For example, ancient Andean agricultural terraces, such as those used by the Inca, optimised water use and microclimates for diverse crop production. These terraces were designed to enhance local food security while maintaining ecological balance. As a result, the terraces exemplify how careful spatial planning and material use can create food systems that withstand environmental extremes.[24] Such approaches offer valuable insights for contemporary farms and gardens, particularly in regions prone to drought or flooding.

Similarly, Indigenous food systems, such as the Aztec *chinampas* or the ancient Egyptians' floating gardens, illustrate how traditional practices can be adapted to contemporary urban contexts. The *chinampas* were constructed as raised-bed plots on shallow lakes, using layers of mud, vegetation, and lake sediment to create fertile land. This method provided a continuous supply of water and nutrients, supporting intensive crop growth and biodiversity while allowing for easy water-based transportation between plots. The floating gardens of ancient Egypt utilised woven reed mats on the Nile's floodplains, which rose and fell with the river levels, ensuring crops were consistently irrigated by nutrient-rich floodwaters. Both systems optimised food production in waterlogged or flood-prone environments, demonstrating how low-tech, adaptive agricultural methods can increase resilience and self-sufficiency in urban food systems today.[25]

24 Julia Watson, *Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism* (Taschen, 2019).
25 Watson, *Lo-TEK*.

In addition to Indigenous knowledge, African American food traditions and practices offer crucial insights for contemporary food system design. Michael Twitty, in his book *The Cooking Gene*, explores how African American agricultural practices, particularly those developed under slavery, have shaped the American food landscape.[26] Twitty highlights the knowledge and resilience of enslaved Africans who brought agricultural techniques and crops that have become foundational to American cuisine, such as rice, okra, and sweet potatoes.

African American communities have long practised sustainable and community-centred approaches to food production, often out of necessity and a deep understanding of the land. These practices include cooperative farming, seed saving, and permaculture, all of which are gaining recognition today for their sustainability and resilience. For example, the tradition of Gullah Geechee farming along the Southeastern US coast, where communities have cultivated rice and other crops using traditional West African methods, showcases a sophisticated understanding of local ecosystems and water management. These practices can serve as models for sustainable agricultural design in flood-prone or coastal urban areas.[27] These spaces of production have also been sites of cultural expression and community building, emphasising the importance of place-making and local autonomy in food systems.[28]

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26 Michael W. Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in a Old South* (Amistad, 2017).

27 Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*.

28 Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

While the scope of this paper is about the reformation of the US foodscape, many lessons can be gleaned from global contexts that might inform a new, collective imagination. For example, in Paris, La REcyclerie transformed a former railway station into an urban farm and community hub, combining rooftop gardens, aquaponic systems, and community workshops.[29] This project demonstrates how underutilised urban spaces can be repurposed to support food production while fostering community engagement and education. By integrating food production into everyday urban life, such interventions can promote food literacy, reduce the carbon footprint of food transportation, and create green-collar jobs in urban agriculture and environmental education. This model also illustrates an innovative governance approach where public-private partnerships and community-led initiatives work together to manage the space, offering a potential governance model for US cities seeking to develop similar community-oriented agricultural and educational centres.

Similarly, in Singapore, Citiponics developed a farm on the rooftop of a multi-storey car park, utilising hydroponic technology to grow leafy greens and herbs.[30] This project illustrates how vertical farming can be integrated into urban environments, making efficient use of limited space while contributing to food security. It also provides employment opportunities in urban agriculture, supporting new business models focused on sustainable, local food production.

Architectural interventions in food systems can push the boundaries of traditional practice by repurposing existing spaces to serve new, sustainable functions. Rotterzwam in

29 La REcyclerie, 'Urban Farming and Community Engagement in Paris', *La REcyclerie*, 2021 <https://www.larecyclerie.com> [accessed 27 August 2024].

30 Citiponics, 'Rooftop Farming in Singapore: A New Model for Urban Agriculture', *Citiponics*, 2020 <https://www.citiponics.com> [accessed August 27, 2024].

Rotterdam exemplifies this kind of architectural ingenuity and spatial agency. The project transforms a section of the former Tropicana swimming pool complex into a thriving mushroom farm, using coffee waste sourced from local cafes as a growth substrate.[31] This innovative use of space illustrates how urban agriculture can flourish in unexpected environments, showcasing the potential for architects to creatively reimagine and activate underutilised urban sites. By applying circular-economy principles — such as converting organic waste into a productive resource — Rotterzwam not only enhances urban sustainability but also demonstrates the power of design thinking to adapt and transform existing urban spaces into hubs of local food production. This project serves as a model for how architects can exercise spatial agency to foster sustainability and resilience in urban food systems, inspiring US cities to rethink their own urban landscapes through imaginative and resourceful interventions.

However, it is essential to recognise that certain barriers may prevent innovative food system interventions from being directly transferable to the US context. The success of projects like Mercat de Sant Antoni in Barcelona is deeply rooted in a strong tradition of local markets and robust community engagement in food systems, less prevalent in many parts of the US.[32] Moreover, public policies and funding structures in Europe and Asia often provide more comprehensive support for sustainable food initiatives compared to the US, where funding for such projects can be more fragmented. In the US, investments in urban agriculture and local food systems frequently rely on a combination of private funding, grants, and public subsidies, each with its own set of complexities.[33] Navigating this financial

31 Rotterzwam, 'About Rotterzwam', *Rotterzwam*, 2020 <https://www.rotterzwam.nl> [accessed 27 August 2024]; Mushroom Cultivation, 'Rotterzwam: Urban Mushroom Farming in Rotterdam', *Mushroom Cultivation*, 2020 <https://www.mushroom-cultivation.com> [accessed 27 August 2024].

32 ArchDaily, 'Sant Antoni Sunday Market / Ravetllat Ribas Architects', *ArchDaily*, 2012 <https://www.archdaily.com/245559/sant-antoni-sunday-market-ravetllat-ribas-architects> [accessed 27 August 2024].

33 Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*.

landscape can be particularly challenging for community-based projects that may lack the resources or expertise to secure diverse funding streams.

While much attention is often placed on urban contexts, there are significant opportunities for architectural and design interventions in peri-urban and rural areas as well. In 'What Are People For?' Wendell Berry argues for the importance of reconnecting communities with their local ecologies and economies, particularly in rural contexts where agricultural practices are often most deeply rooted.[34] Architects and designers can play a crucial role in this reconnection by designing spaces and infrastructure that support sustainable agricultural practices and create more resilient local food systems. This involves thinking beyond traditional urban-centric models and considering how design can enhance the livelihoods of farmers and agricultural workers in less densely populated areas.

Investing in new opportunities for the agricultural career sector requires a holistic approach that encompasses urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. This includes creating multi-functional spaces such as cooperative processing centres, shared-use equipment facilities, and community-focused farmers' markets that cater to the needs of small and mid-sized farmers. By integrating these spaces into rural and peri-urban landscapes, architects can help bridge the gap between producers and consumers, fostering stronger local economies and promoting sustainable food practices. Additionally, designing infrastructure that supports regenerative agriculture, such as greenhouses, seed banks, and cold storage facilities, can provide the necessary support for farmers to thrive in these areas.

Architects can also engage with the capital stack — the combination of funding sources, such as equity, debt, grants, and subsidies — to develop financially viable and socially impactful food projects that extend beyond urban centres. By understanding the economic frameworks that underpin food systems, architects

34 Berry, *What Are People For?*.

can craft projects that align with the unique needs and aspirations of rural and peri-urban communities, ensuring long-term sustainability.[35] For example, investments in community kitchens or food hubs could be structured through local equity investments and impact investors, while regional farms might leverage municipal bonds and federal grants to create financially sustainable and socially impactful food infrastructure tailored to local conditions.

Furthermore, there is a need for policy and advocacy efforts that support equitable and sustainable food systems across all contexts. Architects can work with policymakers to develop regulations that promote sustainable agricultural practices, encourage community-based food initiatives, and support diverse land use practices that benefit both urban and rural areas. This advocacy work can be complemented by engaging directly with local communities, particularly in rural settings, to codesign food spaces that reflect their unique needs and cultural practices, fostering a sense of ownership and agency in shaping their food environments. By considering the full spectrum of contexts — from urban to peri-urban to rural — architects and designers can create comprehensive solutions that address the complex challenges of food systems.

Right now, architects have the opportunity to expand their roles in reimagining food systems by embracing a holistic approach that integrates design with economic, social, and ecological considerations. By exploring new mediums of making, engaging with innovative business models, and advocating for systemic change, architects can help create food spaces that are resilient, equitable, and sustainable. This involves not only designing better spaces but also engaging with the broader frameworks that govern food production, distribution, and consumption. Through thoughtful design, creative engagement, and a commitment to systemic change, architects can contribute to a future where food systems support thriving communities and healthy environments.

35 Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*.

Transforming the US food system requires more than just surface-level adjustments; it demands a fundamental rethinking of how we structure and interact with the spaces and systems that produce, distribute, and consume food. This transformation must address the deeply ingrained colonial legacies that have shaped our current food landscapes, which prioritise efficiency and profit over resilience and sustainability.

Architects and urban planners are uniquely positioned to lead this transformation by leveraging their expertise to redesign the physical spaces and infrastructures that underpin our food systems. Moving beyond traditional roles, architects can create environments that support sustainable agricultural practices, enhance local economies, and foster community resilience. This involves designing multi-functional spaces — from urban farms and food hubs to processing centres and markets — that reflect the needs and values of diverse communities and encourage local food sovereignty. Furthermore, the role of architects must expand to include a deeper understanding of the economic and policy contexts in which food systems operate. Engaging with financial frameworks, such as the 'capital stack', allows architects to develop innovative and sustainable business models that support community-focused food initiatives. By integrating economic viability with social and environmental goals, architects can help ensure that new food infrastructures are not only sustainable but also equitable and accessible to all.

Architects also have a critical role in advocating for policy reforms that support the development of more equitable and resilient food systems. By working closely with policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders, architects can help craft regulatory frameworks that encourage sustainable land use, support urban and rural agriculture, and promote inclusive food practices. This advocacy must be complemented by direct community engagement, ensuring that the voices of those most

affected by food insecurity are heard and reflected in the design and planning processes.

Ultimately, the transformation of our food systems is a collective effort that extends beyond any single discipline. While architects can drive significant change through design innovation, policy advocacy, and economic insight, they must also collaborate with farmers, policymakers, community organisers, and other stakeholders. Together, these efforts can help build food systems that are not only efficient and productive but also equitable, resilient, and deeply rooted in the principles of justice and sustainability. By embracing a broader, more integrated approach, architects can help shape a future where food systems are a source of community strength and ecological balance, rather than exploitation and inequity. This expanded vision of the profession challenges architects to think beyond buildings and consider their role in creating sustainable, just, and thriving environments for all.