**Critical Issues in Your Local Foodshed**

**Class activity for Chapter 2**

***Food, Farms and Community***

**Material Requirements: None**

**Time Requirement: 20-25 minutes**

It is common for activists and advocates to assert that there are benefits associated with producing food locally. While this might be true, it is important to acknowledge that, despite its benefits, local food production is not unambiguously positive. With all commercial activities there emerge a wealth of environmental and social issues, regardless of scale. This exercise will invite students to reflect on real and potential issues associated with local food production.

Break students into small groups of three to five and invite them to describe elements of local food production in the areas they grew up in. Some students will have more to say than others, as not all cities and towns have a strong local food culture, so make it clear that is fine. When students have spent a few minutes discussing their local food experiences, invite them to talk about some of the drawbacks they have noticed that come with local food production and consumption. What, for instance, water quality issues has small-scale agriculture created in their region? What about issues of safety, adequate pay and healthcare for agricultural laborers? What issues of justice and equity may arise due to the presence of undocumented workers? More broadly, are locally produced agricultural products accessible to all who might want to buy them, or are their price points high enough that they enforce a stratification in a region’s real food community? These are just a few of the many issues that a local food economy may struggle with.

Once students have a chance to talk about issues from their own experiences, bring the class back together for a larger discussion. Did issues arise in the small groups that surprised people? Were the issues that came up fundamentally different than those attached to larger-scale agricultural operations and national- and global-scale trade, or were they more or less the same? Did the exercise alter students’ perceptions of the value of local food production? If so, why? If not, why not?