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## St. George's Food Access Initiatives: Navigating Food Inequalities, Forging a Way to Food Choice Freedom, and Transgressing Culinary Borderlands in Lake County, Colorado

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St. George's Food Access Initiatives:  
Navigating Food Inequalities,  
Forging a Way to Food Choice Freedom, and  
Transgressing Culinary Borderlands in  
Lake County, Colorado

Global Studies Honors Thesis  
Mannon R. Frykholm  
May 2022

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Second Reader: Professor Mary Beth Mills



## Abstract

As guided by ethnographic fieldwork and the interdisciplinary discipline of Global Studies, this thesis works to trace food access inequalities in Lake County, Colorado and how they are felt and confronted both at the individual and communal level. Amidst the failures of global food systems and the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, rural communities, such as the fieldsite of Lake County, Colorado, face additional challenges in accessing food that is culturally relevant, craved, and truly wanted. This thesis traces the dominant food inequalities in Lake County. In the face of these inequalities, I centralize the community food initiatives that take place at St. George Episcopal Church in Lake County. St George, as being both a space and a community, works to confront food inequalities through spearheading food initiatives within its sanctuary to make food more accessible for the greater Lake County community. As informed by ethnographic fieldwork in the setting of St. George Episcopal Church's food initiatives, I consider and argue how St. George's food initiatives create the opportunity 1) to name, place, and confront food inequalities, 2) offer individuals and the community opportunities to embolden their right to food choice freedom, and 3) provide a physical space to transgress culinary borderlands. This project draws on a vast literature of food studies to situate my research within. Ultimately this thesis serves, through sharing the story of what food can do and be at St. George, as an example of how tuning into a community's needs can offer solutions to the shortcomings and failures of global food systems that are experienced individually and communally at the localized level.



## Acknowledgements

There are many people that I would like to thank and am indebted to for their support, collaboration, help, edits, thinking, listening, reading, encouragement, kindness, advice, time, conversation, brain-power, and energy spent on my thesis.

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I would like to acknowledge with utmost appreciation Mr. David Hunt whose generous funding made this research and fieldwork possible. And to the Global Studies department at large, thank you. So many professors have shaped, challenged, and changed my view of the world. To the Hunt Committee, Professor Patrice Franko, and my peers in the Global Studies thesis-writing cohort, I admire the fortitude we shared in navigating undergraduate fieldwork amidst the COVID pandemic and feel grateful for being able to share in this process together.

To everyone I met, (re)connected with, and got to know in Lake County this past January, thank you. I would like to acknowledge especially St. George's Episcopal Church and the community that streamed into and through this sanctuary space (and beyond). Thank you for welcoming me into the space and community, for having me as a volunteer, and for the delicious community meals. I learned more about food and community than I could have ever imagined.

To my Aunt and Uncle who hosted me during my research— thank you for the coffee we shared in the early Colorado winter mornings, for the thinking we did about all things related to food, and for the precious time we spent together as I conducted my research. I am grateful for how this project brought me to you both. I am lucky to share a family love like ours.

I would like to thank my parents, Kelli and Jeff, and my brothers, Soren and Joel for their constant love and support. I would not be the person, thinker, and student I am without you all. For reasons completely unrelated to my research, January 2022 brought our family significant loss and sadness. Our family's threads of love and grit carry me (us) forward.

To Vivienne Predock, my dear friend, thank you for the time you joined me in Leadville helping assemble footage and images for this project. Your presence, help, and creative perspective meant so much to me. To my roommates and my extended group of dear Colby friends, thank you for being a constant source of joy for me and for reminding me the importance of finding laughter, light, and love amidst *all this*. I often think I am the luckiest person to have shared my Colby experience with you all. My perseverance on this project would not have lasted without you all there to remind me to enjoy the everyday. Thank you.



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## Introduction

*Food just excites me, I guess. I love it, how it can tell a story and how it can be what we tell a story over. It has variety. It comes from all over and you can learn so much through it. It has so much value in being a shared thing. If you run out of things to talk about at dinner you can at least talk about the food in front of you.*

I wrote these words in my daily journal of fieldnotes the night before my first day of fieldwork began at St. George Episcopal Church in Leadville, Colorado. I had started writing about what my plan was going to be for the next day: to help unbox a delivery of food from US Foods shipments and to set up and help run the St. George Food Pantry free shop. I considered, as I journaled, why I wanted to have food be the central focus of my thesis project in the first place, and realized the innate humanness, the innate being-ness, that our relationship with food entails in the first place.

I woke up the next morning to a beautiful, picturesque Colorado blue sky, and though the wintry air was frigid outside, I was warmed by the early morning sun as I left my Aunt and Uncle's house on my walk over to the Church's sanctuary. I was paying rent to live in the upstairs bedroom of my Aunt and Uncle's home in Leadville, a small mountain city in Lake County, Colorado for the month. I was there to conduct my fieldwork for my thesis in the Global Studies department at Colby College. As I walked to the sanctuary, it was the first week of January of 2022, just a few months shy of two years since the onset of the pandemic hit the area, and having just recovered from my own case of COVID-19 which had delayed the start date of my research, the pandemic was (and still is, at the time of my writing), a very prominent factor in day-to-day life. The Church's sanctuary is home to a variety of food-related community initiatives that were spearheaded because of the onset of COVID-19 in March of 2020. Out of

my love for food, and my fascination with how we make ourselves through what we eat, I decided to focus my thesis research project on food, food accessibility, and food access inequalities in the context of this Church's space and their food-related projects.

I have been asked this question many times throughout my research process: "If you're studying Global Studies, why are you doing a thesis project that is located domestically?" And I realize, it's a good question, certainly valid. My thesis, while situated in the discipline of Global Studies, is grounded in a fieldsite that is domestically located in the United States. What, in particular, about Lake County, Colorado, a place I have grown up visiting over the years being from Colorado myself, was pertinent for a study on food, food accessibility, and food inequalities? As I will argue, I understand food systems as working at various levels simultaneously— globally, nationally, communally, and individually. One way to assess this, I argue, is by tracing how food inequalities, or the contestation of one's ability to access food, are experienced at the localized, individually, and communally-felt level. Food is inherently situated in the context of that which is considered "global" because of its centrality and necessity to the human experience.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in the age of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more and more apparent, as academics, that the world in which we live in, study, and experience can be understood all the more deeply as the global permeating that which we understand and feel as "local".<sup>2</sup> COVID-19, as a global health issue, has tested, strained, and revealed the failures of global systems of food. And as an aside, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that caused me to change field sites and potential thesis topic ideas several times over until I decided in August of 2020 that the safest bet of research in the age of COVID-19 was to conduct fieldwork

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<sup>1</sup>Rosin, Christopher, Stock, Paul, and Campbell, Hugh, eds. 2011. *Food Systems Failure : The Global Food Crisis and the Future of Agriculture*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>2</sup> Reid M, Abdool-Karim Q, Geng E, Goosby E. 2021. How will COVID-19 transform global health post-pandemic? Defining research and investment opportunities and priorities. *PLoS Med* 18(3): e1003564. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003564>

domestically. This decision has allowed me an opportunity to consider academically how that which is considered to be global shows up in what is experienced by individuals and communities locally in the passing of day-to-day life. Thus, I sought out to trace what complicates the community's access to food in the rural, mountain county of Lake County, Colorado. Additionally, my research came not only as a chance to better understand and situate that which is global within a community I knew well having grown up in Colorado myself, but also because, simply put, food fascinates me.

Food is not only sustenance—something that is deeply intimate and personal—but it is also a source of connection between people, a means of communication, and the focal point of many vast interconnected and overlapping global systems. Examining how communities pursue, obtain, and experience food offers insight about how communities operate within (or outside of) the dominant U.S. and global food systems. It also offers the opportunity to examine how food is an avenue through which inequalities can permeate and affect individuals' lives and their communities who, in facing systemic challenges and shortcomings of food distribution, ultimately struggle to meet their daily food needs. Critiquing the shortcomings of a globalized and capitalist system of food access, this thesis works to locate, name, and discuss food inequalities as they are experienced at the localized level.

Located within the field site of Lake County, Colorado, I focus specifically on the space of St. George Episcopal Church and their community-oriented food access initiatives. St. George Episcopal Church, located in downtown Leadville (the only small mountain city within Lake County), is a sanctuary of worship that has, since COVID-19, transformed into a space for free food access that is available to anyone.

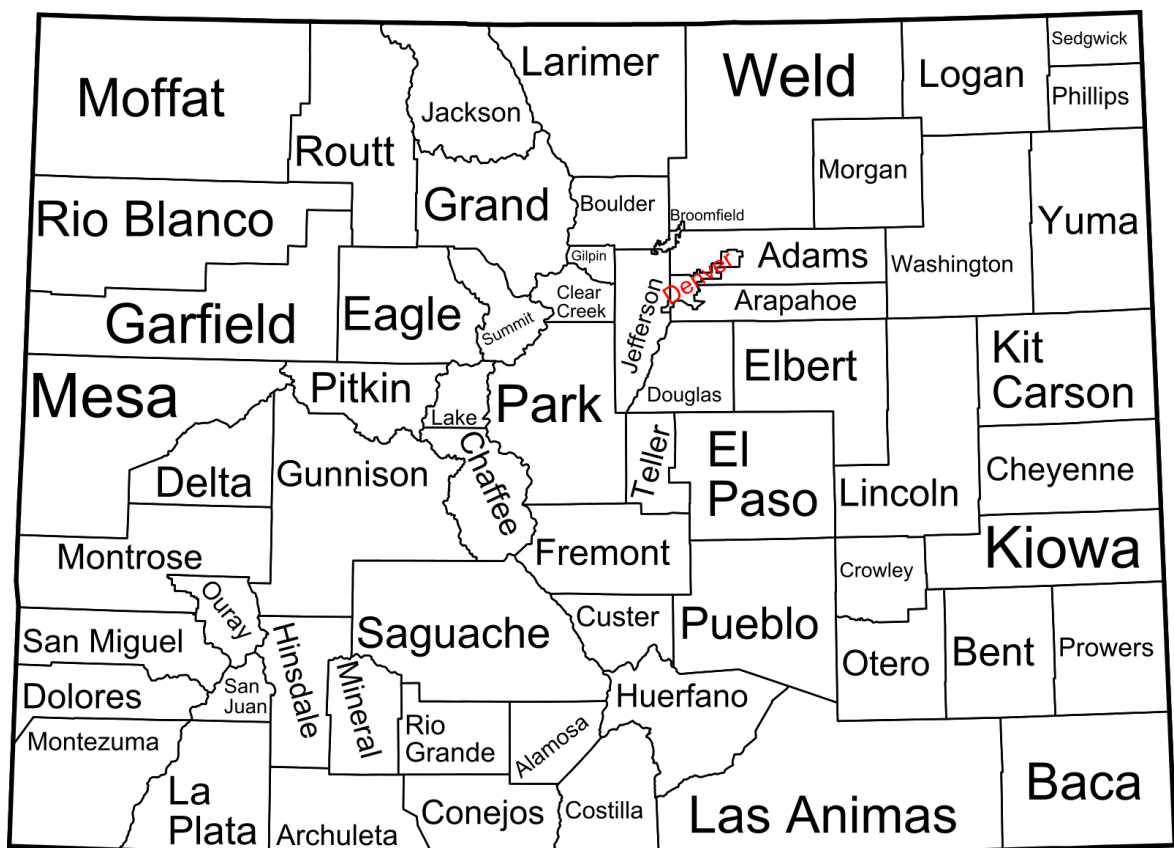


View of St. George's Church, from the front.

Photo courtesy of St. George

Through spearheading several different food-focused initiatives aimed at confronting food inequalities in Lake County, Colorado, St. George is led by its core mission as a church sanctuary. Their website reads, “At the heart of St. George is a diverse community of faith

focused on knowing our neighbors through sharing a common table. The people at St George delight in the adventure of our mission, *building community by welcoming, nourishing, and loving our neighbors as ourselves*, or our secret mission: If we have food, by God we'll SHARE it!”<sup>3</sup> The church sanctuary of St. George, I came to learn in the time I spent there, is a hidden gem in rural, mountainous Colorado that is made rich by the stories, relationships, and community-making taking place via food. This community making, I found, is due both because of and despite its rural setting in Leadville, the sole city that exists in Lake County.



Counties of Colorado. Lake County is located between Park and Pitkin counties.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> St. George Mission Statement. 2022. “St. George Episcopal Church and Community Meals” <https://saintgeorgeleadville.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Benbennick, David. 2009. Map of Colorado Counties. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_Colorado\\_counties\\_labelled.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Colorado_counties_labelled.svg)



Topographic map of Lake County, Colorado.<sup>5</sup>

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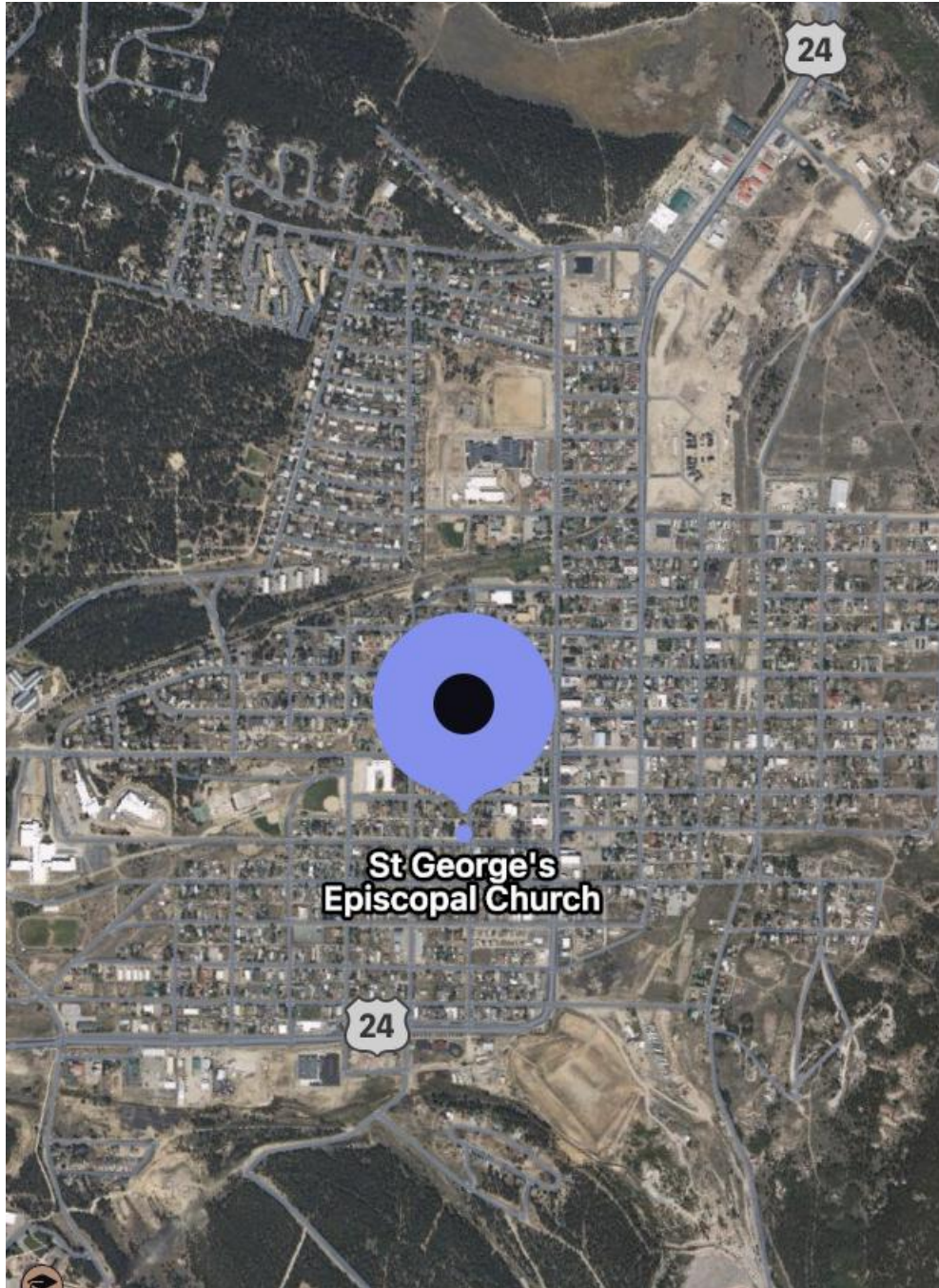
<sup>5</sup> Mastin, Kevin. 2022. Lake County Topographic Map.  
[https://www.kevinmastin.com/old\\_shop/lake-county-topographic-map/](https://www.kevinmastin.com/old_shop/lake-county-topographic-map/)



Leadville's location in relation to other major Colorado cities. For reference, the drive to Leadville from Denver (depending on weather and driving conditions) is approximately two hours.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Apple Maps Imaging. 2022.



Location of St. George Episcopal Church in Leadville.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Apple Maps Imaging. 2022.

Lake County is a high elevation rural community in the heart of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, and is home to the small mountain city of Leadville where I stayed for the month of January of 2022 to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork. My focus for this project centers on the ways in which food inequalities manifest at the localized level in Lake County, and how St. George Episcopal Church's food initiatives have worked to confront these food inequalities amidst and because of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, since its onset, has highlighted the vulnerabilities that rural communities face within the U.S. and larger global food systems.<sup>8</sup>

I focus in this thesis on what the space of St. George has since transformed into after the onset of COVID-19. And while located within a faith-based sanctuary, ultimately, one's faith does not play a role in this setting of food access. Their mission statement continues, "We celebrate diversity. All of our kitchen meal coordinators speak some English and some Spanish. We enjoy sharing the adventure and the ongoing conversation with folks of all faiths or no faith. This LOVE goes deeper than categories or creeds."<sup>9</sup> St. George's food initiatives focus on creating a far reaching and fully community-oriented environment as no individual is turned away. I learned, too, that one of St. George's primary goals is to constantly confuse who is doing the giving and who is doing the receiving in their sanctuary space. As such, and in an attempt to highlight this goal as St. George's way of working to deconstruct stereotypes of making goods for free as a notion of charity,<sup>10</sup> I write too about the organic fabric of community-making that exists at St. George's. Applying an academic lens to the happenings at St. George offers an opportunity to understand more deeply how current food systems that perpetuate inequalities are

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<sup>8</sup> Niles, M.T., et al.. 2020. "The Early Food Insecurity Impacts of COVID-19" *Nutrients* 12, no. 7: 2096. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12072096>

<sup>9</sup>St. George Mission Statement. 2022. "St. George Episcopal Church and Community Meals" <https://saintgeorgeleadville.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dickinson, Maggie. 2020. *Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America's Food Safety Net*. Oakland: University of California Press.

felt and the possibilities that can result when confronting these inequalities. As informed by the people, the place, and food as a means to connection and community-making, I offer three major arguments in this thesis from my time at St. George that I hope to contribute to the academic field of food studies as situated in the larger, multidisciplinary field of global studies. I argue that amidst the complex US and global operating food systems, through their food initiatives and the community-making that takes place as a result, St. George's 1) creates at a localized level the opportunity to name, place, and confront food inequalities, 2) offers for both individuals and the community the opportunity(ies) to embolden their right to food choice freedom, and 3) provides a physical space to transgress culinary borderlands. In studying and highlighting these three processes in particular, I hope to express in this thesis how the disciplines of global studies can achieve a deeper understanding of why food matters as a site itself for studying how inequalities in food systems (as being both globally and domestically situated), exist at the local, individual, and communal day-to-day act of eating.

In an attempt to further the field of global food studies by applying an anthropological lens and interdisciplinary methodologies, I offer in this work a new definition of food choice freedom and take the opportunity to centralize, through an academic lens, the efforts of St. George as an organization within a rural community setting working to actively create solutions to food inequalities in real time for Lake County residents. I argue that looking into the rural communities of the United States is an important departure of study within food studies that offers deeper understanding of the failures of the dominating food systems that control how food is dispersed. Through examining localized challenges of food access and the community responses to these difficulties, food scholars can further understand the complex processes that contribute to obstacles in obtaining food that has sufficient nutritional value, is accessible, and

that is culturally relevant. Through my time spent engaging with the work and literature of food scholars in particular, I have learned that there are many conflicting and conflating factors that can make accessing nutritious and culturally relevant food a contested and inequitable pursuit. Acknowledging these determinants, then, is the first step necessary to face and deconstruct the inequitable systems that dominate and restrict both an individual's and a community's access to food.

This project is an attempt to define the determinants that create food inequality within Lake County. It is also an attempt for me personally to better understand and situate a community I have grown up in and that means a great deal to me. I hope this thesis will illuminate the areas of food inequality of today and the efforts being made to confront them as alternative, community-based solutions that inspire or create change within the dominant food systems that control and often limit localized communities' access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food. I hope to tell the story of a community that means a great deal to me and the story where food has been made into something that can and should be experienced communally.

### **An Overview of My Application of Relevant Food Studies Literature**

Food is a central component to the daily human experience; we depend on food for our survival. As something so integral to the human experience everywhere in the world, there is a substantial literature on food and food systems that crosses many disciplines of study. Thus, the literature on food studies is nearly as complex as the food systems we rely on to get our food. I draw on a variety of literature across disciplines to situate my research on food access in the context of St. George's community organizing for food procurement and distribution in particular within larger discussions on food inequalities, food choices, and culinary borderlands. While

this project is focused on the localized experiences of navigating and confronting food inequality, I see it as also situated within and contributing to global studies both for the study's need for an interdisciplinary lens that incorporates the historical, anthropological, economic, and geographic determinants of food access.

Scholars in many fields have contributed to a vast literature on food, noting the variety of intersecting determinants that contribute and affect one's relationship, and in this case, access to food. Intersecting determinants I came across in my literature review that shaped my research in the field include race, class, gender, national identity (Dickinson 2020; Massoth 2017; Broad 2016; Garth 2020; Alkon 2012); borders (Anzaldúa 1987; Garcia, DuPuis, Mitchell 2017; Khosravi 2010; Mares 2017; Holmes 2013; Alkon 2020); environmental justice, climate change (Williams 2005; Rosin, et al. 2011); the body, notions of health, ability to exercise one's human rights (Lupton 1996; DuPuis 2015; Rabinow 1984); neoliberalism, capitalism, colonialism (Dickinson 2020; Alkon, A.H., Mares, T.M. 2011; Mares 2019); land-access, and land ownership (Pollan 2010). This list of literature, academics, and determinants is certainly not comprehensive. While this thesis will not be able to touch on all of these aspects comprehensively, nor bring all of these scholars into conversation, it is important to understand that food's vitality, complexity, and centrality to the human experience within a globalized world greatly shapes how we create ourselves and our communities.

Food, I will describe, is a site in which borders of many kinds are crossed. Without getting too far ahead of myself, I will draw on the theoretical, argumentative, and methodological tools presented in food literature grounded primarily in the disciplines of anthropology and food studies throughout this paper. Various concepts, methodologies, and framework of past and

current scholars in the field of food studies helped situate my research and studies in the larger conversation of food access as it exists in a present-day reality.

### **The Chapters to Come**

This thesis is separated into five main chapters that incorporate relevant literature throughout. The first chapter works to outline my methodologies and give a deeper historical context of Lake County necessary to situate my focus of food studies. The second chapter highlights the food inequalities felt within the community of Lake County, Colorado. The third chapter centralizes St. George Episcopal Church and their food initiatives that work to confront the food inequalities described in the second chapter. The fourth chapter offers a definition and elaboration of the concept of food choice freedom and discusses how the food initiatives at St. George expand individuals' ability to enact their right to food choice freedom. The fifth chapter, touching on that which is global felt locally, seeks to engage in a conversation of food as a site where borders and bordering takes place (the term culinary borderlands becomes relevant and is defined here) and moreover, works to define St. George as a space where culinary borderlands are transgressed. I conclude with a final chapter that touches on the community-making that happens because of and via food at St. George's.



## Chapter 1: Research Methods and Historical Context of Fieldsite

A rich multi-disciplinary literature on food studies devotes entire journals, periodicals, papers, articles, and books to the study of understanding the innate human relationship with food. As such, there is a wide variety of research methods through which academics have come to understand food, food systems, and food inequalities. Specifically, I see food as a way we make ourselves, as individuals and as communities; it provides a place where many conflating factors of life and living, globalized systems and markets, and the lived daily human experience meet. The broad objective of this project is to understand how people access and experience their relationship to food in Lake County, Colorado. It is also, more specifically, to understand at a deeper level how inequalities exist and impact the human experience through the act of eating.

The purpose of this study is to further conversations on food accessibility challenges that result from structural inequalities that make accessing food an inequitable pursuit between all people. I hope, through the dissemination of my fieldwork and research, to bring forth in the conversation of food the voices, stories, and insight of individuals that confront challenges of food access through personal experiences of both feeling challenges of food access and working to dismantle these challenges firsthand at a day-to-day, localized community level.

### **Fieldsite**

My fieldsite of Lake County, Colorado is home to the small mountain city of Leadville. Having grown up as a resident of Colorado myself, I have often frequented Leadville to visit extended family members who live here year-round, and I like to think a part of me, in many ways, grew up in this town. Lake County is a beautiful and mountainous place, home to some of

Colorado's (and the contiguous 48 states') largest mountains and tallest peaks, bringing in travelers, hikers, backpackers, and adventurers from all over the world. It is home to the infamous "Leadville 100," a one-hundred-mile ultramarathon running race and mountain bike race that brings in stellar athletes from all over the world. While Lake County is just shy of 400 square miles, and is home, according to U.S. Census data from 2021,<sup>11</sup> to just under 8,000 individuals, many people make stops in and travel through this mountain county on their whereabouts throughout Colorado. Though today it is more commonly known for its infamous 100-mile races, outdoor recreation opportunities, and tall peaks, Leadville, as a small mountain city, was established firstly for its mining industry. Leadville has experienced many economic booms and busts over its history because of its rife mining opportunities (though not without environmental devastation and impact to the surrounding geography). Place gold was first discovered in California Gulch in 1859, in which thereafter, quickly, many mining camps were established in the area. One camp, according to mining records, reached a population of 10,000 individuals by 1860, all set on testing their mining luck. At one point, Leadville was the largest lead-silver ore producer in the US.<sup>12</sup> It was also, at one point, legend has it, in consideration for being the location of Colorado's state capital<sup>13</sup>, though Denver, as the current state capital, was ultimately crowned that title in 1867<sup>14</sup> after the forced removal of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians and the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 took place among the plains of Colorado.<sup>15</sup> The county

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<sup>11</sup> "Lake County, Colorado." 2021. U.S. Census Bureau Data. .  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lakecountycolorado>

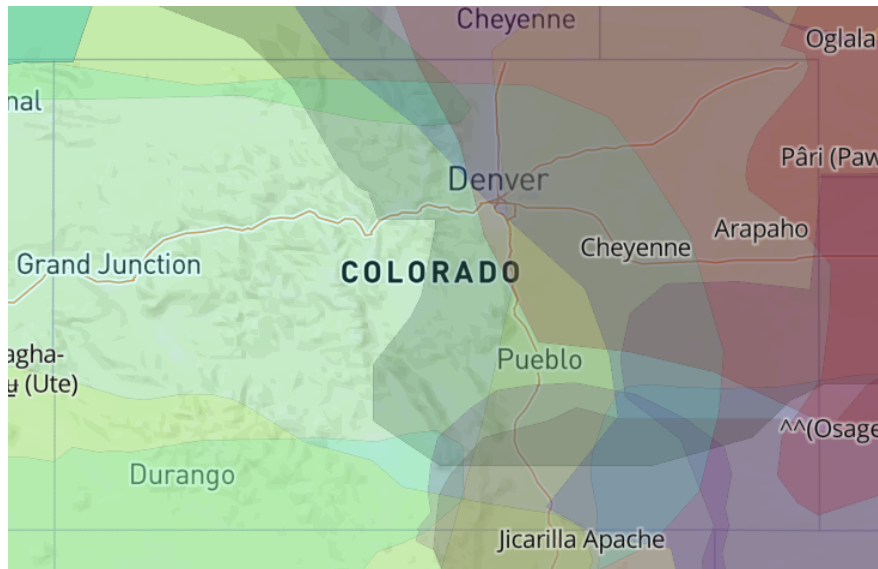
<sup>12</sup> Weittfle, Charles. "Leadville, Colorado History" Mines Repository. Colorado School of Mines.  
<https://repository.mines.edu/handle/11124/9841>

<sup>13</sup> "Welcome to Leadville." 2017. <https://leadville.com/welcome-to-leadville/>

<sup>14</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. 2022. "Denver." *Encyclopedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Denver>.

<sup>15</sup> Greene, J.A. and Scott, D.D., 2013. *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site*. University of Oklahoma Press.

lines of Lake County today occupy and encroach upon the stolen indigenous land of the once local Ute Nation, specifically, a territory called Nûu-agma-tuvu-pu, which is mapped below.



Map of native lands with current settler labels and borders of the US state of Colorado. Different colors distinguish different native territories. Map produced by Native Land Digital.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Map of native Indigenous lands in Colorado. 2022. Native Land Digital. <https://native-land.ca>



Leadville and Lake County on Nuu-agma-tuvu-pu territory. Map produced by Native Land Digital.<sup>17</sup>

The stolen land on which Leadville and Lake County are located has been exploited for its mining opportunities, bringing in settlers at various influxes in the years since gold was first discovered. These influxes have ushered in many eras of both economic booms and busts for Leadville. Despite its booms, Leadville largely remains a city which has distinguished itself from other Colorado mountain cities for its lower cost of living. Today, locals have noted an increase in gentrification by second-home owners purchasing homes in Leadville, an overall rising cost of living, and the presence of many significant housing developments being constructed as Leadville continues to evolve into a location for tourism.<sup>18</sup> Despite these changes, the history of the city's eras of poverty is not soon forgotten. As certainly one of the highest

<sup>17</sup> Map of Ute Land, "Lake County, Colorado" Settler Labeled Territory. 2022. Native Land Digital. <https://native-land.ca>

<sup>18</sup> Hiemstra, N. 2010, 86.

cities in elevation in Colorado (and the US), Leadvillian residents of today both celebrate and endure the hearty lifestyle living in Colorado's rugged mountains requires.

Most residents of Lake County live either in Leadville or just outside of Leadville proper in one of the few neighborhoods that lie within a 10-15 minute drive of downtown Leadville. Despite its growing popularity as a mountain destination and a place to stop enroute to other popular mountain towns in Colorado, interestingly, there is only one grocery store, *Safeway*, that serves the primary food needs of Lake County residents. Due to the fact that there is only one main location where food can be purchased, I believe Lake County is a pertinent and unique place of study to consider food accessibility challenges in a rural but often traveled through destination.

In questioning which populations in particular might face challenges in accessing food in the context of my research, it became important for me to understand before entering the field what populations within Lake County might, due to their identities in the context of living within the United States, face perpetually reinforced and systemic marginalization that makes accessing culturally relevant food a disproportionately challenging pursuit. Lake County, due to its lower average cost of living compared to Colorado's average cost of living, I came to learn, is home to a considerate population of labor im/migrants and undocumented individuals who have travelled across national borderlines to participate in the US labor force. With at least twelve million people estimated to live in the United States without legal authorization, making the undocumented population of the United States the largest in the world,<sup>19</sup> the reality is such that despite an elevated participation in the US labor force, undocumented workers are more likely to live in poverty than US citizens and are, thus, particularly vulnerable to exploitative working

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<sup>19</sup> Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. 2011. *Labor and Legality: an Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network*. New York: Oxford University Press, 36.

relationships, poor and/or dangerous working conditions, and economic instability.<sup>20</sup> These realities rang true for much of the labor force that lives in Lake County.<sup>21</sup>

The trailer park neighborhoods that surround the outskirts of Leadville are home to many Latinx families, some of whom are awaiting papers or documentation, and many whom, daily, make long drives beyond Lake County's borderlines and over mountain passes in Colorado to reach the more affluent tourist ski mountain towns such as Aspen, Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Telluride, and the like, for work opportunities. Authors Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Pellow write in their ethnography *The Slums of Aspen* about the experiences of low-wage immigrant workers in Aspen, Colorado. The immigrant workers on which Park and Pellow's research focuses provide labor within wealthy, tourist-driven mountain towns inhabited and made economically exclusive by the rich and/or famous who own homes or vacation in towns such as Aspen, Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Telluride, and the like. My research was informed by their ethnographic work as it provided a background to understanding im/migrant and undocumented labor conditions that occur specifically in Colorado's small mountain cities. In particular, they write about the demographics of Colorado towns, which I found applicable to my studies:

While it is impossible to know how many undocumented persons are in the [mountain] region, there are estimates available. Michael Comfort, the deputy district director for the Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) in the late 1990s, estimated that between 35,000 and 45,000 undocumented persons live in Colorado. The Pew Research Center estimates the undocumented immigrant population of Colorado to be 4.5 percent of the state's workforce, but the number in the Roaring Fork Valley is likely much higher.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. 2011. 37-38.

<sup>21</sup> Hiemstra, N. 2010, Immigrant "Illegality" as Neoliberal Governmentality in Leadville, Colorado. *Antipode*, 42: 74-102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00732.x>

<sup>22</sup> Park, Lisa Sun-Hee; Pellow, David N.;. 2011. *The Slums of Aspen*. New York: New York University Press. 70.

Although these numbers are slightly dated in terms of statistical data and population estimates, I highlight them to express the fact that firstly, there is not much literature on the mountainous regions of Colorado, and secondly, nor are there many state-led efforts to accurately represent the demographics in this area. More recent data, pulled from a variety of census reports and listed on DataUSA, note that in Lake County specifically, roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population identifies as Hispanic or White/Hispanic. Though these designations and definitions of ethnicity deserve separate analysis and critique, especially in the context of considering the implications of statistical representation, I highlight them as a way to contextualize (some of) the demographics of Lake County and the surrounding mountain towns. DataUSA notes that, as of 2019 census data, approximately 92.4% of residents in Lake County are considered citizens, and approximately 34% of residents in the area were born outside of the United States.<sup>23</sup>

State-led census data that outlines the demographics of rural mountain cities are misrepresentative of the actual number of im/migrants and their families who have traveled from the Southern U.S.-Mexico border and reside and contribute to these communities.<sup>24</sup> Many of these im/migrants have traveled to these mountain areas for opportunities of work, namely providing essential, low-wage jobs in expensive ski towns (Sun-Hee and Pellow refer to them as “playgrounds for the rich and famous”). Many workers fulfilling roles in essential jobs within Colorado are undocumented, and are often labeled and marginalized in society as “illegal”.<sup>25</sup> The notion of “illegality”, especially when attached and enforced upon the identities of im/migrant workers, perpetuates structural violence that both racializes and socially, politically, and economically marginalizes migrant workers.<sup>26</sup> While I did not observe or encounter these

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<sup>23</sup>“Lake County, Colorado.” 2021. Census Data, DataUSA. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/lake-county-co/>

<sup>24</sup> Park, L., Pellow, D., 2011, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Heimstra 2010, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

discursive labels of illegality being used to describe anyone I met or encountered while in the field, it is not because they weren't being used.

Interestingly, Lake County is “home” (meaning the physical environment of one’s residential place of living) to more undocumented residents than any other mountaneous community in Colorado because of its lower cost of living in Lake County, a distinction necessary to note between Sun-Hee and Pellow’s fieldsite of Aspen and my fieldsite of Lake County.<sup>27</sup> As such, many individuals from Lake County make long commutes, daily, in order to live in the more affordable mobile home satellite communities within Lake County but all the while providing wage-labor in other, more expensive towns. As COVID-19 hit, it became apparent just how much our supply-chain systems depend on these “essential workers,” a buzzword label commonly used to describe, particularly during the height of the pandemic, those whose employment fulfills critical infrastructure operations within healthcare, agriculture, transportation, and critical retail sectors.<sup>28</sup> What’s more (to say nothing of the questionable, exploitative, and unsafe working conditions, both before, during, and after the onset of COVID-19 of these essential jobs) is that many second-home owners were able, during the pandemic’s onset that caused a major shift to virtual workplace settings, to flee into remote mountain towns where many undocumented workers were forced to continue to work through the pandemic. Ultimately, the rapid influx of outside, second-home owner residents introduced the coronavirus to these rural communities and put a major strain on local healthcare systems.<sup>29</sup>

This reality highlights the exploitative nature of labor markets and their ability to produce a politics of invisibility among these mountainous communities and particularly among people

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<sup>27</sup> Heimistra 2010, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Lancet. 2020. The plight of essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lancet (London, England)*, 395(10237), 1587. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31200-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31200-9)

<sup>29</sup> Hawryluk, Markian. 2020. “Ski Towns Are Absorbing Much Of The Coronavirus Exodus — And It Threatens To Strain Their Health Care Infrastructures” <https://www.cpr.org/2020/09/15/colorado-ski-towns-coronavirus-relocation-health-care-strain/>

without formal documentation. For these reasons, I argue that Lake County, though a smaller, mountainous community than the communities often studied in food scholarship to date, is an interesting point of study to consider the intersections of im/migration, food access, and community responses to issues of food inequality especially throughout the onset of COVID-19.

## Overview of Methods

In *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*, Klein and Watson write in the introduction that “the anthropology of food has become a postdisciplinary field of study that cuts across the traditional boundaries of academe.”<sup>30</sup> As readers will see in my thesis, borders and the transgression of borders through food consumption and food access become concepts that my research seeks to explore and expand on. As such, it is important to me as a researcher to consider and work beyond the boundaries of academe in this research itself, seeing both the power of ethnography as well as its limitations, such that when relevant and when faced with obstacles in the field, I can work to address any fieldwork limitations by drawing on the work of past food scholars and their interdisciplinary approaches of food study.

My project’s fieldwork was primarily guided by ethnographic fieldwork practices established within the field of anthropology. However, as this thesis seeks to contribute to global studies via the topic of food, the scope of food studies in particular also “incorporates environmental studies, demography, science and technology studies, journalism, information/computer sciences, transnational business and global studies.”<sup>31</sup> In an attempt to understand the daily experiences of individuals facing food accessibility challenges, I conducted

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<sup>30</sup> Klein, J.A. Watson, J.L. 2016. *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474298407>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 1.

a month of ethnographic fieldwork that incorporated multidisciplinary research methods to investigate food as a place where many culminating factors influence our experience of it. In the attempts to create a “study about food and food use [that] incorporates cultural analysis of text of all sorts to better understand the emic worlds of the peoples being studied”<sup>32</sup> I worked too, through my methods, to also create a study that incorporated an interdisciplinary approach of ethnographic study and research methods to holistically approach the topic of food and food study.

While I found myself confined to a limited time frame to conduct my ethnographic study due to the nature of the undergraduate research experience, this did not limit my research on the subject of food and food accessibility while situated in Lake County, Colorado, my fieldsite, for the month of January of 2022. My research focused primarily on the daily operational events taking place during St. George Episcopal Church’s food initiatives which, in broad terms, work to provide alternative food opportunities to the larger community of Lake County. My time in Lake County focused on the individuals, including the volunteers, paid employees, cooks, and food recipients who were involved and interacted with the St. George Episcopal Church food initiatives. I learned of the challenges and shortcomings working in a community space that is funded primarily by grants and donations. While I initially assumed the faith-based space of St. George would be an important factor in my studies, I learned that though St. George has operated as a space of worship, it has, of late, been operating as a community-based space for food access. My research was guided primarily by an ethnographic focus that centralized the stories and individual lived experiences of people interacting with St. George’s food initiatives.

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<sup>32</sup> Chrzan, J., & Brett, J. (Eds.). 2019. *Food Culture: Anthropology, Linguistics and Food Studies* 1st ed., Vol. 2, 12. Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04d9k>

During my ethnographic fieldwork at St. George's my research methods included participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, extensive field note taking, and a collection of local community research reports ranging from reports on food to data regarding housing and county demographics. Volunteering and participant observation also became central to my project. My volunteering brought me into the various different food spaces at St. George's. I spent many frigid January mornings helping unload trucks of food shipments and setting up the sanctuary for its weekly food pantries. I offered a helping hand in St. George's kitchen to assist the cooks working the community meals. I helped stock and join the mobile food pantry "Moby" on its weekly food drop offs to different Lake County residence communities. I sat in on St. George's food initiative meetings. My time in the sanctuary space allowed me to meet and speak to the paid employees of St. George whose roles are centered around the food operations. I met a wide range of volunteers, many who used St. George as a primary food source themselves. I encountered a diverse population of visitors to the pantries and community meals each week who navigated, simultaneously, food inequalities situated within the U.S. food system, their food choice freedom(s) at St. George, and the culinary borderlands that exist within food.

### **Ethnographic Fieldwork**

My approach to conducting ethnographic fieldwork is informed primarily by the standards of study and codes of ethics within the field of anthropology. Emerson et al. writes of ethnographic field research in the second edition of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*:

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. Carrying out such research involves two distinct activities. First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it... the ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on. Indeed, the term 'participant observation' is often used to characterize this basic research approach. But,

second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others. In so doing, the researcher creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences. These two interconnected activities comprise the core of ethnographic research: firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world that draw upon such participation.<sup>33</sup>

While my ethnographic fieldwork was primarily guided by the methods most often utilized in the field by anthropologists and social scientists who rely on participant observation to inform their studies (Emerson; Bernard), it was also informed too by both the work and the questions raised by past food scholars having engaged in ethnographic research in their studies. In particular, I drew on the past work and ethnographic frameworks of Broad, Dickinson, Mares, Holmes, and de Souza.

When immersing myself in the field, I spent most of my time volunteering and conducting participant observation at St. George Episcopal Church's food initiatives, which entailed three main projects occurring simultaneously each week: weekly free-shop food pantries, weekly mobile pantry food drop off deliveries and the free shop, and weekly servings of community meals cooked in St. George's kitchen.

These spaces served as rich and insightful settings for participant-observation as well as spaces to conduct community networking by means of convenience and snowball sampling that helped me find informants who were willing to share their experiences of food and food challenges, in whatever capacity that might mean to them, with me.

Bernard defines convenience sampling as "a glorified term for grabbing whoever will stand still long enough to answer your questions."<sup>34</sup> In snowball sampling,

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<sup>33</sup> Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. 1995. *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 191.

...You use key informants and/or documents to locate one or two people in a population. Then, you ask those people to (1) list others in the population and (2) recommend someone from the list whom you might interview. You get handed from informant to informant and the sampling frame grows with each interview. Eventually, the sampling frame becomes saturated—that is, no new names are offered.<sup>35</sup>

I relied on these two methods of sampling to find key informants in the field. My primary contacts, or key informants – “...people who know a lot about their culture and are, for reasons of their own, willing to share all their knowledge with you”<sup>36</sup>-- expanded during my fieldwork to include the overseer and coordinator of all food operations at St. George’s (I will call her Bianca), the organizer of the mobile food pantry (I will call her Ana), a handful of cooks and volunteers at the community meals, and the many community members that entered the space of St. George to both volunteer and/or shop for food.

## **Interviews**

I interviewed key informants through semi-structured interviews that were “open ended, but followed a general script and covered a list of topics from an interview guide.”<sup>37</sup> I also relied greatly on informal interviews and conversations that were “characterized by a total lack of structure or control [where] the researcher remembers conversations heard during the course of a day in the field.”<sup>38</sup> I, as Bernard suggests, practiced daily jottings, “...in which you sit at a computer, typing away, unburdening your memory, and developing field notes.”<sup>39</sup> I spent time daily recording my observations and fieldnotes from conversations and moments throughout the day to ensure important details that informed my research weren’t forgotten.

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<sup>35</sup> Bernard 2006, 193.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Gaining informed oral consent from my interviewees became essential during my time in the field, especially because I occasionally encountered individuals who were considered undocumented. While no data exists that reveals the documentation status of people receiving food aid in Lake County, I wanted to be extremely cognizant of the precarity of the identities of im/migrants or undocumented individuals that I met and, additionally, have used pseudonyms throughout this research to protect any individual's identity.

Additionally, I ensured all participants were made aware of their right to step away from their participation at any moment, as well as their right to dictate what information they shared with me that they would want shared in any form as they see fit into my research. My time in the field was also impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In consideration of the pandemic, I made sure to consider any participants' health and wellbeing by following all mandated policies regarding face masks social distancing to be as considerate as possible of the comfort levels of people I interacted with throughout the month.

### **Written Field Notes**

My research was greatly informed by the daily practice of written fieldnotes. My field notes consisted of carrying a notebook with me at all times to serve as a place for my jottings. I produced a daily log of activities noting what I had planned to accomplish each day. I spent a considerable amount of time logging my fieldnotes, noting “on the methods [I] used each day, the descriptive notes from watching and listening, and the analytical notes about theory and organizational elements of what [I] experienced.”<sup>40</sup> My daily journaling practices allowed me to digest the time I spent in the field each day.

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<sup>40</sup> Bernard 2006, 389.

## **Incorporating Local Data Sets into My Research**

In addition to the on-the-ground ethnographic aspects of my fieldwork, I have worked to incorporate local data sets completed by the Lake County Build a Generation (LCBAG) organization into my research. By connecting with and surveying community members through several different community partnerships, this organization, based in Leadville, seeks to “engage [a] diverse groups of residents and organizations in the work of community change... [to] ensure that a healthy life is accessible to all, regardless of who they are or how much money they make.”<sup>41</sup> To achieve this mission, LCBAG has completed several community outreach programs and studies that illuminate some of the challenges residents of Lake County Face. Food is one the topics they seek to consider. Through community networking, I was able to gain access to research and community data completed by Lake County Build a Generation organization which helped deepen my understanding of food inequalities in Lake County as they had produced both quantitative and qualitative data. Analyzing this community research and data completed by the Lake County Build a Generation greatly informed my understanding of the challenges of food access within Lake County. I relied on analytical text analysis methods of textual coding, as outlined by Chrzan, J. Brett, J. 2019, to understand and apply these existing data sets produced by the local community to gain a deeper understanding of the demographics of Lake County in the context of food and food access. As such, part of my research includes the various sources of demographic, quantitative, and qualitative data sets that have taken place within Lake County by local community researchers. I will outline in the pages to come the research done by community members and organizations that became relevant and useful in informing my research on food accessibility challenges situated in Lake County and the larger Colorado area.

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<sup>41</sup> “Mission and Beliefs.” 2021. Lake County Build a Generation Website.<https://lcbag.org/our-mission-beliefs/>

## Navigating my Positionality in the Field

In *“Illegal” Traveler: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*, Shahram Khosravi writes that “Studies of migrant illegality are often written by people who have never experienced it.”<sup>42</sup> This is true for me. I am a descendant of white, European immigrants, born in Colorado, on the stolen land of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute nations. I found it a necessary practice to return to and constantly consider my positionality throughout this project, to acknowledge my privilege as a young white woman here in the United States, and to admit that I have been privileged to have never had to worry much about what meal shows up on my table next. In the context of research within academia and encountering people who may be considered undocumented, I completed ethics training with the Office for Human Research Protection to inform me on current standards of ethics in the field. The contestation of the identities of those who are considered undocumented within the United States creates the potential ramifications and threats of deportation, detention, or arrest. Though I never asked for anyone's documentation status, for the sake of protecting any participant's information, all names in this thesis have been changed to protect the anonymity of all individuals with whom I engaged.

My positionality as a young, white, female undergraduate student both emboldens me with many privileges and limits me in terms of my accessibility and contextual understanding of the realities of the situations informants experienced with whom I engaged. I have not ever been undocumented, an immigrant, nor have I gone hungry. Why then, I found myself asking prior to embarking on my research, is this area of study relevant to me, or a topic of study I should be

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<sup>42</sup> Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. *'Illegal' traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 6.

engaging in? I believe that, while my personal identity might have, and rightfully so, limited me from understanding and empathizing with some of the community at St. George I came into contact with, I believe that the questions I considered and my research motivations compelled me to utilize my privileges to conduct ethnographic research that is both sensitive to the precarity of the identities and vulnerabilities of those I met ultimately as an opportunity to uplift the voices, stories, and lived experiences in a way that is productive and considerate. Because of the diverse community of Lake County, I found my ability to speak Spanish useful to best communicate with or interview informants in the field. This also allowed me, during my fieldwork, to build rapport with community members and to spend much of my time working to contribute to St. George's community-led efforts of expanding food access, ultimately allowing me to build relationships that have lasted far beyond this research and study. Moreover, as Colorado is a place I personally call and consider home having grown up there, my positionality grants me the opportunity to understand more deeply and academically, what it means to be a part of a community.



## Chapter 2: Tracing Food Inequalities in Lake County, Colorado

What exactly is a food system? To be able to critique and trace the inequalities that impact an individual's food access in Lake County, it is necessary to define what a food system is, how it operates, and what it entails within the greater context of the United States and global food systems. I borrow a broad definition from the University of Oxford's Future of Food Martin Program which defines a food system as the "complex web of activities [and infrastructures] involving the production, processing, transport, and consumption of food."<sup>43</sup> Food systems, they continue, are composed of many different subsystems, ranging from "farming systems, agricultural ecosystems, economic systems, and social systems and within those are further subsets of water systems, energy systems, financing systems, marketing systems, policy systems, culinary systems, and so on."<sup>44</sup> Accessing food, the pursuit of attaining one's sustenance necessary for life, can be complicated by how these systems operate at the globalized and localized level.

The great and frustrating irony of the United States food system is that it perpetuates a racialized capitalist market economy paradigm<sup>45</sup> which causes as a result, daily, tons and tons of perfectly edible food to be thrown out; approximately 30-40% of food that is produced in the US goes to waste (amongst many other issues– I highlight food waste as just one example of how a racialized capitalist market economy paradigm fails us).<sup>46</sup> Food waste is itself a fascinatingly complex and insightful place of study to understand food and food systems, perhaps a topic for further future research, and though I will not delve deeply into the issue here, I found the topic

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<sup>43</sup> Future of Food. 2022. "What is the food system?" <https://www.futureoffood.ox.ac.uk/what-food-system>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Holt-Giménez, Eric. 2015. Racism and Capitalism: Dual Challenges for the Food Movement. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 23-25. 10.5304/jafscd.2015.052.014.

<sup>46</sup> Food and Drug Administration. 2022. "Food Loss and Waste." <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste>

came up from time to time while in the field as a tangential issue in the context of food production in the United States. A brief point of departure away from food access to consider food waste illuminates the deeply troubling reality of how much food in the daily operating global food systems goes to waste.

The issue in the dominant US food system, situated in a global food system, is not that there isn't enough food; the sheer amount of daily food waste proves this to be true. Rather, it is that people are still hungry *despite* the vast amount of food that is wasted. Approximately one pound of food per person is wasted per day in the United States and in 2017 alone, the EPA noted that almost 41 million tons of food went to waste.<sup>47</sup> The reality of hunger and food insecurity persisting in the United States amidst a system that overproduces food that is continually thrown out, was put into theory by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen in their 1989 work *Hunger and Public Action*. They argue that the issue of food insecurity (the presence of mass hunger and famines) is not due to food shortage, but rather, due to a failure of individuals being entitled to food. Food entitlement failures, as they term it, result in individuals being forced to find work that will pay a wage that only then will allow them the financial means (or entitlement) to be able to purchase food.<sup>48</sup>

The term “free” in a free market economy does not imply an explicit right to food choice freedom, a term I will define in depth later, but that essentially presumes the idea that individuals should have the freedom to choose whatever food they want to consume. In a neoliberal “free” market economy, consumers are entitled to only what they can afford to purchase. Because of this, ensuring one has access to food in the United States is predicated on a dependency of having a job which even still does not promise the fulfillment of having access to food that is

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<sup>47</sup> Food and Drug Administration. 2022. “Food Loss and Waste.”  
<https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste>

<sup>48</sup> Drèze, J., & Sen, A. 1989. *Hunger and Public Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 9.

wanted, nutritious, craved, desired, or satisfying. While a neoliberal perspective urges that only free markets can produce economic growth needed to sufficiently increase household incomes enough to attain food security,<sup>49</sup> Drèze and Sen contest this notion by determining that “What we can eat depends on what food we are able to acquire. The mere presence of food in the economy, or in the market, does not entitle a person to consume it.”<sup>50</sup> When tied to the obligations of a capitalist market economy, when a household cannot afford to buy food, “its members will go hungry regardless of the overall food availability in the country.”<sup>51</sup> The question then becomes, how do we provide food for households free of cost so that affordability isn’t even a consideration when pursuing food security? Failure entitlements, or not being entitled to one’s food without paying a price for it, leave the working class particularly vulnerable to hunger even when employed (and even more so in the face of unemployment). Differences in income emboldens among consumers different levels of entitlement to certain types of foods that often vary greatly in their nutritive value. There are different types of food that only through having more purchasing entitlement can they be acquired (think organic fruits and vegetables that typically have much higher prices at the grocery store). As such, with persistence of the cyclical nature of structural poverty, so too persists the risk of lacking access to food required to live a healthy life.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, if coming to the United States as an undocumented worker, as is the case for many residents in Lake County, it becomes all the more tricky to navigate a food system that is already doubly set up to fail you and fail to see you. The free market economy paradigm of having to purchase food to get what you need and having to be employed to be able to purchase

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<sup>49</sup> Fairbairn, Madeleine. 2010. “Framing Resistance: International Food Regimes & the Roots of Food Sovereignty” in *Food Sovereignty*. Oakland: Food First Books. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Drèze; Sen 1989, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Fairbairn 2010, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Watts MJ, Bohle HG. The space of vulnerability: the causal structure of hunger and famine. *Progress in Human Geography*. 1993;17(1):43-67. doi:[10.1177/030913259301700103](https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259301700103)

food in the first place means that, in the words of food scholar Maggie Dickinson, “In the US context, the right to food is tied to the obligation to work... Aside from being independently wealthy, the only legitimate way to get food is by working, depending on a worker, or claiming an inability to work because of old age or disability.”<sup>53</sup> Having a dependency on having to work to provide food rang true for residents in Lake County.

One particularly frigid January Wednesday morning, I was managing the line into the food pantry, which because of COVID restrictions, meant only a handful of individuals could enter the church’s sanctuary to shop at a time. We asked for some basic information, the name and number of individuals in the household they were coming to shop for, to both keep track of the number of visitors coming each week and to best anticipate the amount of food to order for future weeks. Managing the line gave me the opportunity to informally speak with individuals about why they were at the food pantry as I took note of their names through the door.

One woman was particularly agitated this morning, demanding she had to shop during the senior hour, though she was not a senior-aged shopper. While at first I had to explain to her that the first hour of the food pantry was open only to seniors to ensure they could take their time through the line and get their necessary items, her frustration with me only grew: “You don’t understand. I was here at 8:45 to get the earliest number slot. I need to go through this line so I can get to work on time. This is the only time I have to shop during the week, and I can’t be late for work. You understand that I’d lose my job if I show up late, right?”

Bianca, the overseer of the food pantry, happened to walk by at this moment and overheard the frustration in her voice. Bianca reiterated to her that the first hour was generally just for seniors, but that it would be okay for her to go through anyways. “I try to be

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<sup>53</sup> Dickinson, Maggie. 2020. *Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America’s Food Safety Net*. Oakland: University of California Press, 147.

accommodating to everyone...” Bianca began to tell me after the woman began to rush through the line.

“...It is a balance. People need to understand that a lot of us here are volunteers and we’re doing the best we can to try and provide as much as we can for as many people that need it. Not everyone understands that, especially on the first few times they come to the pantry. I think with time though, the more people show up, become regulars here, they start to understand that we’re doing all we can to support the community. We care about everyone. I understand when people get upset, everyone has their own things to take care of, their families, their jobs, their worries. People are complex, difficult. But at least here, we’re able to reach out to people through food, you understand? We can fill souls, tummies, and friendships because of this food. That’s what is important. So yeah, we make accommodations for people as much as we have to because that’s what community is. We have to look out for each other.”

Both the need for justifying the senior shopping hour and the woman’s need to shop during that time frame made sense to me. They both were valid. The accommodation made sense. But with more thought I realized that the accommodation we gave to this woman in particular only came up so that she could fulfill the obligation of getting to work on time, in a disciplined fashion. The right to access her food, even in an environment where the food was freely available to her at no cost, still came second to her having to work, and at the expense of hurriedly encroaching the hour designated for senior shoppers. The individually felt demands of having to both get sufficient food and get to work on time was not without stress for this woman. In imagining a food system, it prompts the question, is it possible to separate work demands from the pursuit of getting food? Can acquiring food be(come) an act that is stress-free?

The food system of Lake County is tied to the larger operating food system of the United States, in which most individuals are forced into the role of a consumer in the market economy to purchase food needed to survive. For most, this looks like going to a grocery store or restaurant to purchase food or ingredients that have been produced, grown, or manufactured at a different

location.<sup>54</sup> Food is delivered to a particular store or restaurant via commercial food supply transportation chains, many of which exist across international borderlines. A historical look into food supply chains reveals that the American food system is often changing and developing depending on growing seasons, consumer choices, and more recently, the global impacts of climate change;<sup>55</sup> though I do not delve into the history of food chain supply changes in the United States, within a market economy, individuals remain tied to their role as a consumer in order to access most of their food.<sup>56</sup> This obliged relationship to the market economy ushers in, because of systemic inequalities within various subsystems of the food system, a host of challenges individuals face in the pursuit of food.

Situating the localized experiences of attaining one's food supply in Lake County within the larger context of US food systems allowed me to understand how food access inequalities surfaced for individuals in Lake county. Food inequalities, I came to learn, surfaced due to intersecting determinants, all of which were tied to, and mediated by, the larger US and global food supply chain systems. The following section outlines the most prevalent and deeply felt inequalities within Lake County.

### **Tracing Food Inequalities in Lake County**

Within the context of the American food system, Lake County is a unique location in particular for food study due to its rural but diverse population. Food inequalities are felt deeply and daily by its community members. I will outline five of the most prevalent inequalities I found came up during my conversations with individuals coming to St. George's that

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<sup>54</sup> Nesheim MC., Oria M, Yih P. 2015. "Overview of the US Food System." Washington (DC): National Academies Press US, 2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK305173/>

<sup>55</sup> Bailey, R., & Wellesley, L. 2017. Chokepoints and Vulnerabilities in Global Food Trade. London: Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/>

<sup>56</sup> Nesheim; Oria 2015, 2.

complicated and challenged their access to food in Lake County: first, situated in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado at an elevation above 10,000 feet, the geography and location of Lake County; second, a limited supply of grocery stores; third, the affordability of food in Lake County; fourth, transportation (lack of, or access to); and fifth, a variety of food associated stigmas surrounding individuals' food choices.

I understand these five factors as being not a comprehensive list to every person's experience of food access in Lake County, but as the most prevalent and significant factors influencing and creating unavoidable circumstances for individuals I engaged with during my fieldwork. I came to learn that these inequalities were further exacerbated and experienced both individually and/or familially based on one's class, neighborhood location, (un)documented status, job and employment status, place of origin, having recently immigrated, one's race affiliation, spoken language, and/or gender, as well as the time of year and growing season. Many of the individuals/families I met during my research faced different combinations and confluences of these factors, experiencing on any given day at least one or multiple of these factors.

I learned of these factors through informal conversations, interviews with community members in Lake County, and the 2020 Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. The 2020 Lake County Community Food Access Community connector Research Report was completed February-June of 2020 by the Lake County Build a Generation organization. In surveying fifty individuals in Lake County about their food acquiring habits and the impacts of limited food sources in Lake County, the report revealed realities about both consumer habits as well as the lengths (quite literally, in terms of distances people travel to acquire food) individuals in Lake County would go to in order to attain (more) affordable food.

The report was funded in late 2019 after Lake County received a Community Food System grant from the Colorado Health Foundation to “conduct community research and imagine a food system for Lake County that would be resilient, self-sufficient, and provide access to healthy, affordable foods for all residents.”<sup>57</sup> The Lake County Build a Generation (LCBAG) took on the research-based grant in which they hired five community members to serve in the role of Food Access Community Connectors. Community Connectors’ roles included conducting research to provide information for community-driven decision-making for future-oriented food system strategy. The data and information Community Connectors gathered from the community highlighted the strengths, the gaps, and the community’s imaginations of “what could be” of the already existing food system within Lake County.

Unknowingly at the time of receiving the grant, the community research came about at a particularly revealing time. Community Connectors began conducting their research via interviews, discussion panels, and community art projects in early March of 2020. Within a few weeks of their research came the news of COVID-19 spreading throughout the United States. While ultimately forcing the research to be completed virtually, the pandemic uncovered the gaps of food distribution within Lake County and across the United State.

Informed by this report and by speaking with individuals who felt constraints toward their access to food allowed me to better understand how precariously the US food system operates and fails to meet basic needs for the majority of the working class in the United States. I will outline these five major inequalities in this section to provide a necessary contextual background into the efforts St. George is making to confront these inequalities specifically which comes in the chapter that follows.

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<sup>57</sup>Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. 2020. Lake County Build a Generation, 4. <https://lcbag.org/resources/food-access-community-connector/>

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Primary factors contributing to food inequalities in Lake County: |   |
| 1. Geography/Location   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lake County is located above 10,000 ft of elevation</li> <li>- Short growing season (~25 days/year)</li> <li>- Winter driving conditions can exist October through May making food deliveries unpredictable</li> </ul> |
| 2. Lack of grocery stores   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One commercial grocery store (Safeway) in Lake County creates a monopoly in the market</li> </ul>  |
| 3. Affordability of Food  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are higher prices for groceries in Lake County because of adverse driving conditions, delayed shipments, and Safeway's monopoly</li> </ul>   |
| 4. Transportation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individuals need transportation to get to the grocery store in Lake County or if traveling outside of Lake County for alternate grocery shopping locations</li> </ul>  |
| 5. Food Stigmas   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Various food associated stigmas create beliefs that create certain foods belong only to certain groups of people/identities</li> </ul>   |

### **1. Geography/Location**

Lake County is an isolated, mountainous community. One highway, U.S. Route 24, brings people to (or through) Lake County. Tourists will either stop in Leadville, the only city and largest residential area in Lake County, or will journey through and out of the town in just a few short minutes of a drive on the highway that also makes up Leadville's Main Street. Leadville's Main Street can often be found busy with tourists, mountaineers, motorcycle bikers, ultrarunners, skiers, Leadville locals and families, either stopping for a quick bite to eat, a peruse through window shops, or if one's lucky, perhaps for their designated appointment day to shop at Melanzana, the locally owned and renowned clothing store.

Though it is known for its physical beauty and landscape, often a destination for tourists because of its beauty, the landscapes and mountains of Lake County themselves contribute to

food inequality within Lake County. The geography of Lake County, sitting above 10,000 feet amongst a background of dramatic 14,000+ foot peaks, creates often treacherous mountain highway passes and adverse weather conditions ultimately making it difficult for food truck deliveries to arrive on time or on schedule, if at all.<sup>58</sup>

Wintry conditions, beginning as early as October through well into May, often delay food shipments, affecting the quality of the fresh food being delivered, as well as decreasing supplies of basic needs items. When speaking with St. George's food coordinator Bianca, she mentioned that *"We send our food orders weekly to US Foods, that is one of my weekly duties, but the truck is often delayed or shows up unpredictably. This is hard because we want to be as reliable to people coming to get their food from us as we can."*<sup>59</sup> An economic lens applied to this context reveals that due to limited or delayed shipments, a limited supply of goods when met with a high demand for these goods ultimately raises the prices for items that many consider necessary for day to day wellbeing (fresh produce, especially).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, out-of-season produce, traveling from either domestically far and/or global shipment sites, often lacks quality due to the longer shipment times it takes to get to Lake County.

More still, due to the high-mountain climate of Lake County, the average growing season lasts for just twenty-five days. Late frosts are not unusual in July.<sup>61</sup> Very few vegetables and fruits can be grown in just thirty days. Additionally, in order to grow one's own produce, a considerable amount of knowledge about growing at high altitudes, such as how to navigate short growing seasons, or having access to a garden plot or greenhouse and the appropriate plants

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Ana

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Bianca

<sup>60</sup> Bailey; Wellesley, 2017, iv.

<sup>61</sup> Cox, R., Klett, J.E. 2013. "Colorado Gardening: Challenge to Newcomers." Colorado State University. [colostate.edu/colorado-gardening-challenges](http://colostate.edu/colorado-gardening-challenges).

and seeds for the climate's growing conditions are all necessary first before being able to grow one's own produce.

While the dominant food system in the United States makes it so that it is possible for more people to survive in such a mountainous climate by making food available via food supply chains, the unpredictability of weather, driving conditions, and growing season affects greatly the day-to-day ability to actually access that food, regardless of where the food comes from or where it is bought or obtained from.

## **2. Limited Food Purchasing Options**

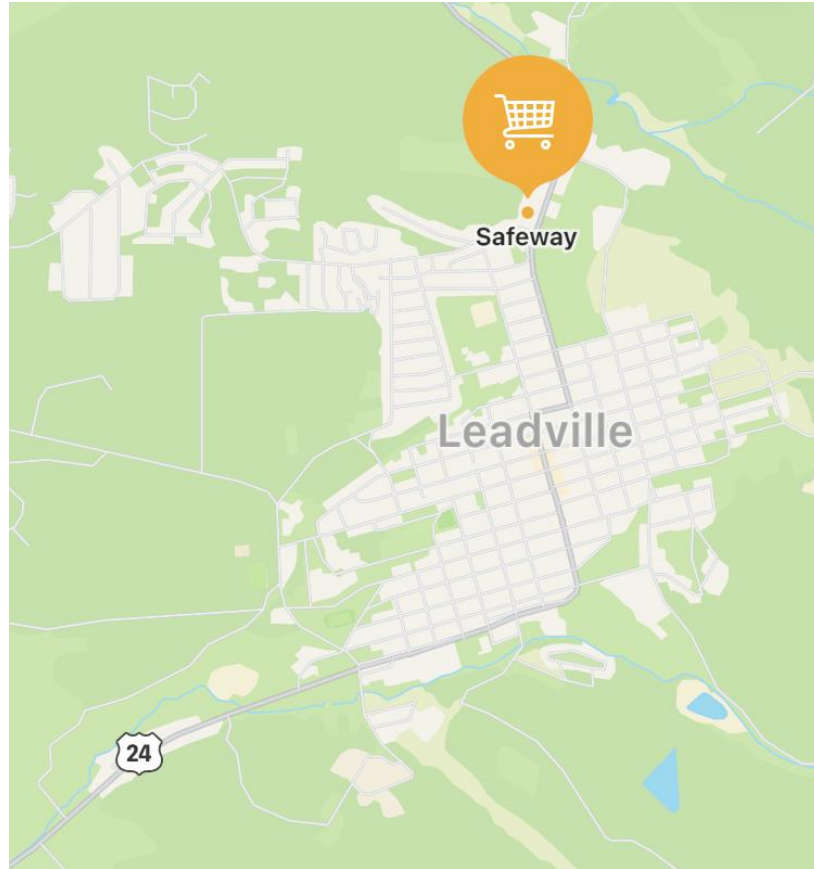
A limited supply of food purchasing options in Lake County hinders food access opportunities for Lake County residents. Without considering restaurants in Leadville or the limited community garden plots that are run by volunteers during the summer months,<sup>62</sup> there are only three primary types of locations where food and grocery items can be purchased in Lake County, all of which are concentrated within the city of Leadville: Safeway, Family Dollar, and convenience/gas station stores.

- I. The first, (and also the most popular food retail option to purchase groceries from), is the Safeway located on the outskirts of Leadville. This is the primary source of food purchasing that occurs within Lake County.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. 2020. Lake County Build a Generation, 4. <https://lcbag.org/resources/food-access-community-connector/>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



Map of Leadville; Safeway is located towards the north end of Leadville proper. Apple Maps Imaging.

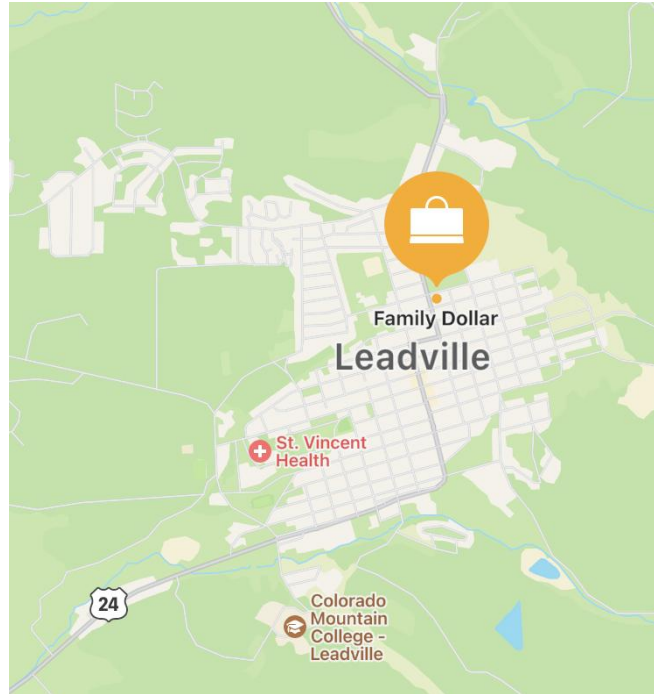


A view of Safeway from across the street.<sup>64</sup>

- II. The second option is Family Dollar, located across the street from Safeway. This Family Dollar sells only basic shelf-stable foods such as cereals, plastic packaged snacks and candies, and some canned staples, including beans, soups, and vegetables.

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<sup>64</sup> Beall, Jeffrey. 2020. Image of “Leadville North, Colorado.” Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leadville\\_North\\_Colorado.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leadville_North_Colorado.JPG)



Location of Family Dollar.<sup>65</sup>

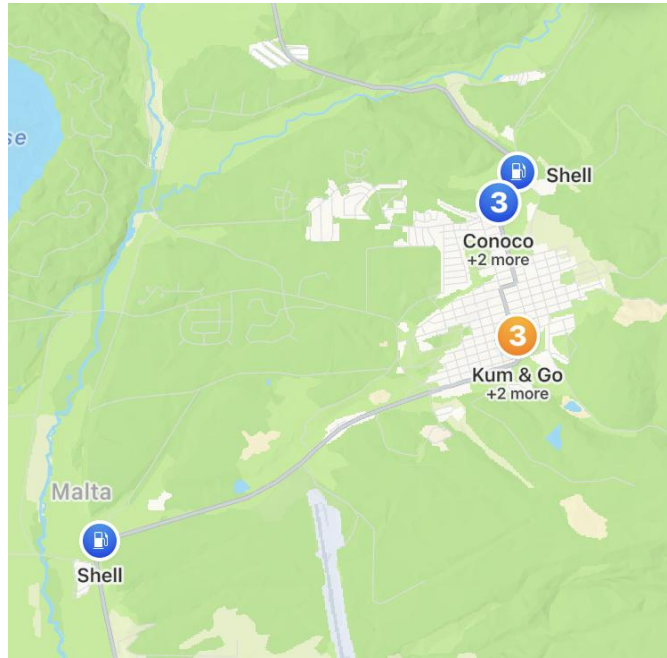


A view of Family Dollar from the parking lot.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Apple Maps Imaging. 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Meeuwsen, Rickie. 2017. Image of Family Dollar in Leadville. [Family Dollar](#).

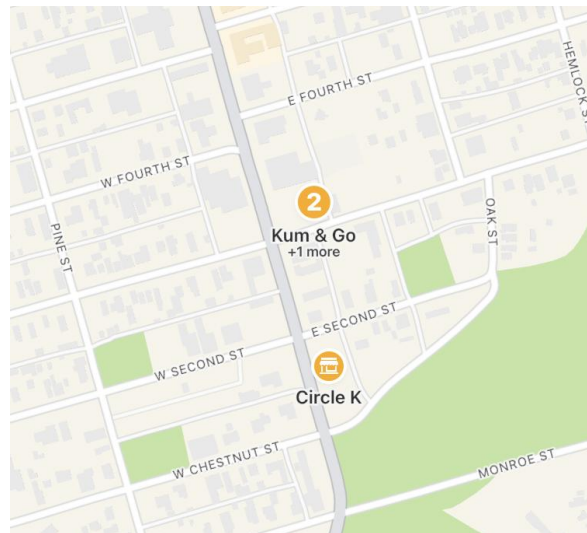
- III. Finally, throughout Leadville exists a handful of small convenience stores accompanying gas stations that sell shelf-stable products and common convenience store items.



Overview of Convenience store locations in Lake County.



Zoomed in view of the convenience stores on the north end of town.



Zoomed in view of the convenience stores on the south end of town.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Apple Maps Imaging. 2022.



Kum & Go located in Leadville<sup>68</sup>

These are the three main options for food purchasing in Lake County. While Safeway provides the widest selection of foods, produce, and items in all of Lake County, it is limited, still, by the size of its store. For reference, the average local grocery store in the United States sits at about 45,000 square feet,<sup>69</sup> and many retail supermarkets such as a Kroger branded supermarket or Walmart range more typically anywhere from 100,000-150,000 square feet in size. The Safeway in Leadville sits at 17,000 square feet, a considerably smaller footprint for a grocery store. While it could be argued that Leadville is not nearly a large enough city for a corporate supermarket model to enter the city limits, its small size certainly limits the amount of food and produce that can be supplied for its shoppers. As a shopper at St. George put it frankly one day when I asked them to compare shopping at St. George's free markets to shopping at

<sup>68</sup> Image of Kum & Go, Leadville. Mapio. <https://mapio.net/pic/p-85299889/>

<sup>69</sup> Dunkley, B., Helling, A., & Sawicki, D. S. 2004. Accessibility Versus Scale: Examining the Tradeoffs in Grocery Stores. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23(4), 387–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X04264890>

Safeway, they stated that “surprisingly, you never really actually know what you’re going to be getting and be able to pick up at the store,” suggesting that St. George’s actually became a more reliable food source for them. Having visited my family in Leadville for my whole life, walking through those Safeway aisles, I can attest to that sentiment. There have been many re-planned meals out of my aunt and uncle’s kitchen in which we’ve had to supplement random ingredients because Safeway was out of whatever core ingredient the recipe called for that night.

Aside from shopping at Safeway, the dollar store and convenience store shelves only offer typical shelf-stable ingredients. Within the field of food studies, there exists a literature on the economic impacts that nontraditional food stores, such as dollar stores and convenience stores, have on rural communities. This scholarship problematizes the impacts that the market strategies of dollar stores/convenience stores have on communities and local economies because the intentional low prices offered at these corporate chain stores drives out and puts out of business local stores.<sup>70</sup> As Sharkey writes in the article *Measuring Potential Access to Food Stores and Food-Service places in Rural Areas in the U.S.* about the impact of these chains of dollar stores and convenience stores,

“In many rural areas, the convenience store is the main source of food items. As a result, rural families with only convenience or small stores from which to choose experience higher prices and lower selection and quality of foods than those shopping in larger supermarkets... The loss of small-town grocery stores, which increases the distances that rural residents must travel to obtain food, is particularly critical for low-income families who face continued threats to food access and food security. They have less independent access to a vehicle, face income limitations and lack of public transportation, are more likely to shop less frequently and at one rather than multiple grocery stores, and must expend greater resources to obtain food through normal sources.”<sup>71</sup>

This is true for Lake County residents. Having just a handful of convenience stores to shop at that all offer the same varieties and brands of pre-packaged and processed food, while

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<sup>70</sup>Sharkey, Joseph R. . 2009. Measuring Potential Access to Food Stores and Food-Service Places in Rural Areas in the U.S., *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 36, Issue 4, Supplement, Pages S151-S155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2009.01.004>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

useful for attaining basic-need items, does not provide for nor fulfills the nutritive needs of residents in Lake County. Convenience stores are convenient, as their name suggests, for providing ready-to-go meals or snacks. However, offering primarily just processed goods at these locations means individuals shopping there are having to purchase goods that on the whole tend to have lower nutritive value and are actually less cost-effective than having a meal prepared fresh in a kitchen.<sup>72</sup> This leads me to the next inequality individuals in Lake County face, the affordability (or lack of affordability) of food in Lake County.

### 3. Affordability of Food

The affordability of food, in Lake County and beyond, is dependent on many factors. First, at the actual cost-level, because of both the difficulty of getting food to Lake County and the limited supply of food options, prices for food and ingredients are higher in Lake County compared to the national average price of food.<sup>73</sup> Safeway, in particular, having the monopoly on grocery stores in Lake County, sees the most traffic for food purchasing within Lake County. As such, prices are considerably higher than most grocery stores, both because of its monopoly as well as the difficulty and unpredictability of food deliveries that vary seasonally. Fresh produce, especially out-of-season produce, is sold at a considerably higher price. The prices at Safeway, when compared to grocers in neighborhood counties, are on average 12% higher.<sup>74</sup>

Beyond just the actual prices of food being higher, and thus, less affordable, the 2020 Lake County Community Food System Community Connector Research Report noted that

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<sup>72</sup> Rahkovsky, I., Jo, Y., Carlson, A. 2021. What Drives Consumers to Purchase Convenience Foods? US Department of Agriculture.

<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2018/07/24/what-drives-consumers-purchase-convenience-foods>

<sup>73</sup> Olsen, E., Baldassar, K. 2019. Lake County Healthy Food Access Community Assessment and Report. Omni Institute. <https://lakecountyfoodaccessreport.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

individuals residing in Lake County consistently face a lack of available or high enough quality fresh food at the local Safeway, and due in part also because of the higher prices at Safeway,

...they [were] willing to drive over high mountain passes, in potentially poor weather conditions, and at least 30 minutes each way to purchase their food. Walmart stores in three different other counties were just as frequently noted as a primary food purchasing option as the grocery store [Safeway] in town.<sup>75</sup>

The fifty community member interviews conducted for this study, 75% of which represented the Latinx/Hispanic community in Lake County in an attempt to highlight marginalized community voices, noted the ways they got their food supply at the time (2020), which revealed of their responses the following:

Roughly 70% of respondents shopped both in town and out of town. 13% noted they shopped primarily in-town, and 17% noted they shopped primarily out of town. Of these respondents,

- 62% of respondents shopped at Safeway consistently
- 17% of respondents hunted and/or fished
- 12% of respondents visited St. George's Church pantry
- 6% of respondents grew their own food
- 4% of respondents frequented Family Dollar
- 4% of respondents visited the Cloud City Farm
- 2% of respondents purchased food online

Interestingly, the report also noted how far respondents who traveled outside of the County would drive:

- 52% of respondents shopped at Walmart (~30 miles away, by car)
- 29% of respondents shopped at City Market (~40 miles away, by car)
- 12% of respondents shopped at Costco (~60 miles away, by car)

While this study was completed in 2020 and the landscape of food access in Lake County has changed directly because of COVID-19 and the ensuing efforts of St. George's food initiatives, it still paints a picture of the continued reality of the food landscape in Lake County

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<sup>75</sup> Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. 2020. Lake County Build a Generation, 4. <https://lcbag.org/resources/food-access-community-connector/>

and the limited options of food sources people have access to. By and large still today, individuals wanting to complete their food purchasing in Lake County are left with just one primary food shopping source, Safeway, which subjects individuals to monopolized prices and a limited selection of foods, especially fresh produce.

Finally, food inequality is intimately tied to systemic inequalities in the United States: “The specter of hunger,” food scholar Maggie Dickinson writes, “is haunting the same people it always has– the poor, the undocumented, low wage workers, the un- and under employed... the systems for ensuring people can access the food that exists have been broken for a long time.”<sup>76</sup> Most people living in the U.S. access their food by having to first work for wages necessary to afford food in the first place; this is true for most individuals in Lake County, Colorado as most individuals in Lake County work jobs for wages necessary to survive, to pay rent, and to take care of families’ various needs. Due to the limited supply of food purchasing options in Lake County, individuals have to pay higher prices for their foods when purchasing from Safeway in town. Monopolized prices and delayed food shipments increase prices at Safeway in a week to week and seasonal fashion. This unpredictability contributes to anxiety surrounding food accessibility.

#### 4. Transportation (lack of, or access to)

As discussed in the previous section, to be able to purchase from a larger selection of food options, individuals must have access to proper transportation to travel to grocery stores beyond what is available in Leadville and Lake County. As many families rely on jobs outside of Lake County, transportation becomes another tricky factor to have to rely on in the pursuit of

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<sup>76</sup> Dickinson, Maggie. 2020. “Food frights: Covid-19 and the specter of hunger”. *Journal of Agriculture and Human Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10063-3>

food purchasing.<sup>77</sup> Wintry conditions that persist through late spring and beginning early fall each year also make it difficult to access food sources reliably.

The following link, listed below, will bring readers to a video I took of Moby, St. George's mobile food pantry, during my fieldwork in January. Viewers can see a volunteer drive Moby through snowy conditions to get to one of its free-shop food pantry drop off locations as I follow in a vehicle behind. This video gives readers a clear picture of just how treacherous winter conditions can be in Lake County during the winter. One's access to transportation is necessary to get to a food source, such as Safeway, in the first place. Without transportation, acquiring food becomes a difficult task.

Follow this link to view Moby driving through winter conditions: <https://youtu.be/PYj2Y8rTwhI>.

## 5. Food Stigmas

Finally, various food-associated stigmas are felt and individually internalized that negatively influence individuals' food choices and food purchases in Lake County. The Dictionary of Sociology defines a stigma as a label that associates people with unfavorable or disapproved behavior and characteristics.<sup>78</sup> In the context of food, stigmas attach stereotypes to the behaviors of food choice, food purchases, and food consumption based on the identities people associate themselves with. As Ganglbauer et al. note, the processes of racialization, class differentiation, and gendering roles in particular influence the stigmas individuals might feel affect their food choices.<sup>79</sup> Food stigmas are internalized at the individual level by associating

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<sup>77</sup> Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. 2020. Lake County Build a Generation, 7. <https://lcbag.org/resources/food-access-community-connector/>

<sup>78</sup> "Stigma Definition." 2022. Sociology Dictionary. <https://sociologydictionary.org/stigma/>.

<sup>79</sup> Ganglbauer, E. et al. 2014. *Think globally, act locally: a case study of a free food sharing community and social networking*. In *Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social*

negative feelings towards one's own food cravings, food purchases, and food choices.<sup>80</sup> The affective element of food stigmas, by which I mean the attachment of negative feelings towards food, ultimately impacts how one behaves around food and their food choices. When negative feelings that are influenced by social stereotypes are attached to food that an individual, at one point, had deemed relevant or important to their diet, a food inequality has taken place for how it negatively affects and limits one's access to food they desire.

In the 2020 Lake County Community Food System Community Connector Research Report, survey respondents were asked to name feelings they associated with their food purchases and food sources within Lake County. Respondents repeatedly reported feeling a variety of negative feelings that they associated with their food sources. The report outlines the responses of individuals' most common negative feelings associated with the act of food purchasing in Lake County as the following: fear, intimidation, frustration, confusion, defeat, and shame.<sup>81</sup> These stigmas were associated with both the food purchases they were making, the spaces of food purchase, and the prices of food, ultimately changing individuals' behaviors in the presence of food.

A cook at St. George's community meal, a member of St. George's congregation, and a volunteer who frequents the food pantry noted how people can feel a lot of anxiety about their food sources and food choices when they come to St. George's the first few times. Stigmas, as blending negative feelings towards one's food and food choices, ultimately put into question one's relationship with food itself and a politics of deservingness surfaces in one's relationship to

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*computing*. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 911–921.  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/2531602.2531664>

<sup>80</sup> Earnshaw, Valerie A. Karpyn, Allison. 2020. Understanding stigma and food inequity: a conceptual framework to inform research, intervention, and policy, *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, Volume 10, Issue 6, Pages 1350–1357, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa087>

<sup>81</sup> Lake County Community Food Access Community Connector Research Report. 2020. Lake County Build a Generation, 14. <https://lcbag.org/resources/food-access-community-connector/>

food.<sup>82</sup> When food and food choices become stigmatized, a significant change in one's diet can take place. Reducing the amount of whole foods that are most filling and nutritious, for example, directly impacts the lifestyle and health of individuals.<sup>83</sup> Thus, stigmas in the presence of food affects individuals' food decision making, which inhibits one's ability to make food that truly align with what might be most craved, most nutritious, or needed.

St. George's food efforts work to confront these five primary food inequalities. As one cook mentioned, "People need to know they can rely on us for our consistency." While individuals experience these inequalities at different points in their day-to-day lives and at varying degrees, they are, nonetheless, experienced communally. Thus, through permeating food inequalities perpetuated by dominant global food systems, global food systems, at large, fail communities. In an area such as Lake County, for its rural setting, food inequalities are felt deeply. When the community faces challenges to acquiring food, it is felt individually in how people choose and access their food. After tracing these inequalities, my research turned to the space of St. George's to consider how the community was confronting them, as it was no doubt that the community felt these inequalities everyday.

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<sup>82</sup> Chapter four discusses at length the politics of deservingness in the presence of one's food choices.

<sup>83</sup> Rose, D., & Richards, R. 2004. Food store access and household fruit and vegetable use among participants in the US Food Stamp Program. *Public Health Nutrition*, 7(8), 1081-1088. doi:10.1079/PHN2004648



## Chapter 3: St. George and Food Access

As the pandemic hit in mid-March of 2020, St. George closed their physical sanctuary for faith practices and transitioned to an online setting. The transition online was coupled with the anxieties and fear people felt and shared not just in Lake County but across the country with the oncoming pandemic. As well, at the onset of the pandemic, grocery stores were hit hard with increased demands and new restrictions of capacity limits, cleaning requirements, and mask mandates. Essential workers were put in new roles to manage these restrictions. As in many locations across the United States,<sup>84</sup> shelves at Safeway, at times, were emptied as panic set in with the uncertainty that the pandemic brought. Panic buying across the United States left individuals questioning, “will there be toilet paper? Diapers? Baby food? Rice? Beans? Meat? Fresh vegetables and fruit?”<sup>85</sup> As many individuals in Lake County live paycheck to paycheck, especially those working wage labor jobs, many could not stock up or purchase large quantities of goods at the onset of the pandemic. Additionally, many undocumented immigrants work in industries that were at higher risk for job loss during the pandemic because their roles were difficult to perform remotely.<sup>86</sup> Or, on the flipside, many undocumented individuals working in sectors considered “essential jobs”, were forced to work throughout the pandemic to continue to earn a paycheck, all the while possibly having underlying health conditions and being exposed to coronavirus.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hobbs, JE. Food supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Can J Agr Econ*. 2020; 68: 171– 176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cjag.12237>

<sup>85</sup> Arafat, S.M. Yasir. Kumar Kar, S., Menon, V., et al. 2020. Panic buying: An insight from the content analysis of media reports during COVID-19 pandemic, *Neurology, Psychiatry and Brain Research*, Volume 37, 100-103, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npbr.2020.07.002>.

<sup>86</sup> Conversation with Ana

<sup>87</sup> Krogstad, J. 2020. “A majority of Americans say immigrants mostly fill jobs U.S. citizens do not want.” Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/10/a-majority-of-americans-say-immigrants-mostly-fill-jobs-u-s-citizens-do-not-want/>

Before long, members of St. George decided that in these unprecedented circumstances and in the wake of the collective panic and empty shelves at Safeway, there was a very real and pressing community need for food that was both fresh, nutritive, and free of cost. The sanctuary of St. George thus transformed rapidly into an emergency food pantry. While food insecurity was not new to Lake County when the pandemic hit, the onset of COVID actually highlighted the reality and heightened circumstances of food insecurity the community faced, especially as a rural community.<sup>88</sup> There came a need to address these challenges to food access when food became even more precariously unavailable. When interviewing Ana, the food program coordinator and overseer of St. George's food bank, community meals, and mobile food pantry, she noted that while at first the pandemic left individuals without food, quite literally worried about going hungry, the food insecurity brought on by the pandemic allowed for St George to transform into a food-giving and food-receiving space. COVID forced individuals to enter the space of St George, destigmatizing individuals' perspective of receiving food aid, free food, and food pantries. As one newcomer to St. George mentioned to me in passing, "I never knew free food was a thing that could happen!" Frequenting the space of St. George's allowed individuals and the community space to confront food inequalities and to reimagine their relationship with food itself.

### **The Role of St. George in Confronting Food Inequalities Post Onset of COVID-19**

With the onset of the pandemic, St. George's transformed into a food giving/receiving space. Though St. George had offered a somewhat-limited rescued food pantry, multiple times weekly warm community meals, and served (as it still does today) as the site for the monthly Food Bank of the Rockies food shipment (a monthly food bank shipment with food available for

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<sup>88</sup>Dickinson 2020, 589.

anyone) to its community members before COVID hit, the pandemic prompted St. George to expand these food initiatives.



St. George's sanctuary space, before COVID-19 hit. <sup>89</sup>

The intention of St. George's expanded food initiatives came from a great community need for free and accessible food in the context of COVID-19, and as such, St. George's guiding objective became to provide as much food free of cost for anyone, no questions asked. Funded initially by emergency state funding as Colorado declared a state of emergency with the onset of the pandemic,<sup>90</sup> St. George quickly became a crucial site for food access, especially during the initial months of the pandemic.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Image of St. George's sanctuary. 2017. MapsUS. <https://mapsus.net/US/st-george-s-episcopal-church-3704931>

<sup>90</sup> Covid-19 Public Health Executive Orders. 2020. Colorado Gov.

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/public-health-executive-orders>

<sup>91</sup> Frykholm, Amy. 2021. "Welcome. Nourish. Love." Medium: Colorado Episcopalian.

<https://medium.com/colorado-episcopalian-fall-2021/welcome-nourish-love-64985b805a73>

The physical sanctuary space of the Church in April of 2020 completely transformed to become the site for a no-cost everyday pantry for food. The pews of the sanctuary began to hold boxes of food items. Industrial refrigerators entered the sanctuary to hold fresh produce, cheese, milk, and frozen meats of all varieties.



St. George's Free Shop unboxing and setup in the sanctuary. Photo courtesy of St. George.

As the larger community beside the Church's congregation began to come to the sanctuary for food, members of St. George and the Lake County Food Access Coalition (a partner subsector of the LCBAG), began to apply for outside grants to fund the food operation in anticipation for when emergency funding would run out. Before the pandemic hit, St. George did not spend any money nor had a budget for any of their existing food operations. In 2020, for

the first time in its history, St. George created a budget for food operations, spending ~\$100,000 on food alone in one year. This budget held true for 2021 as well, funded by a handful of grants and expanded community donations.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, with the increase of people coming weekly to the food pantries and community meals, community financial buy-in for the pantry has increased since these food operations expanded. I sat one day in the office with the executive administrator of the St. George food operations putting stamps onto “Thank You” letters to send to people that had donated financially to St. George’s. As we sat in the office, a gentle snow falling outside, she noted how in 2021 there was a notable increase of the amount of financial support St. George received from donations from community and individual donors located within Lake County to support its food operation because of how successful and central the food initiatives had become for the community.

The food operations of St. George at the time of my fieldwork, still amidst the COVID pandemic, included the following expanded efforts: a several times weekly free-shop food pantry, four community meals a week, and a recently launched mobile food pantry (“Moby”) that delivers food to different neighborhoods two-three times a week. Additionally, St. George still continues to host monthly the Food Bank of the Rockies mobile food drop off which is available to anyone who registers for the service.

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<sup>92</sup> Conversation with grant writer, Ana

| Free Food Initiatives at St. George   | Objective   |
|---|---|
| <p>Walk-in Free Shop Pantry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weekly, Wednesday 9AM-12PM and Saturday 9 AM-11AM</li> <li>- Seniors only for the first hour</li> </ul>  | Offer free food available to anyone, no questions asked.  |
| <p>Community Meals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weekly meals on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 11:30AM-12:30PM</li> </ul>  | Offer free nutritious hot meals available to anyone, no questions asked.  |
| <p>Mobile Food Pantry, “Moby”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Operation seasonally</li> <li>- Summer: offers shop out of bus three times weekly, once at each of the following locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lake Fork Community</li> <li>- Mountain View Community</li> <li>- Mountain Valley Estates</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Winter: Tuesday at Mountain View West Community Center, 5PM-6PM</li> </ul> | Offer free food available to anyone, no questions asked, in locations that might not have transportation to St. George or that cannot shop at morning hours of the food pantry. |
| <p>Location site for Food Bank of the Rockies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Once a month at St. George Episcopal Church</li> </ul>   | Offer free food from the Food Bank of the Rockies shipment. Available to anyone with registration until products are gone.  |



Individual shopping at the walk-in free shop. Photo courtesy of St. George.



Thanksgiving community meal. Photo courtesy of St. George's.



Moby, the mobile food pantry bus.

The physical food offered at St. George's food initiatives come from a variety of sources. First, funded by the grants and St. George's newly created food budget, St. George places weekly shipment orders into US Foods, which are delivered weekly. The order is placed by Bianca, who as the overseer of the food operations, is a paid employee whose role includes keeping track of how many people show up, what food is in highest demand, and how much to order each week from US Foods. Second, there is an influx of rescued food that is made available at St. George's. In the face of overwhelming food waste, especially in the United States, there exists scholarship on the act of rescuing food as a source of confronting over-production of food waste.<sup>93</sup> Rescued

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<sup>93</sup>Gollnhofer, Johanna F. 2017. Normalizing alternative practices: the recovery, distribution and consumption of food waste, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33:7-8, 624-643, DOI: [10.1080/0267257X.2017.1301982](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1301982)

food is defined as “the practice of retrieving edible food that would otherwise go to waste... In most cases, the recovered food is perfectly edible, but not sellable. For example, it’s day-old bread or bagged lettuce past its “sell-by” date. Often, it’s in great shape.”<sup>94</sup> As Diprose and Lee note, food rescue is a form of collective community care through the ways in which it “collectively manages surplus food, addresses food poverty, and reduces waste.”<sup>95</sup> St. George, before COVID-19 hit, rescued food from the local Safeway, but with the increased demand for food, has since expanded from just Safeway’s rescued food supply to make available rescued food each week from various grocery stores that lie beyond the County’s limits. Each week volunteers from around the community offer to drive to the neighboring cities of Frisco and Silverthorne to pick up rescued food items from Whole Foods and Target. I was always especially excited for the rescued food drop-offs during my time at St. George’s. There was something so exciting about the delivery of rescued food that made me feel as though we had come across a treasure trove of free goodies. Each week brought in a variety of rescued food items. My favorites were the deliveries that brought a massive bounty of beautiful hand-decorated cakes and cupcakes from Whole Foods.

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<sup>94</sup> Bloom, Jonathan. 2022. “Wasted Food: Food Rescue.” <http://www.wastedfood.com/food-rescue/>.

<sup>95</sup> Diprose, G. & Lee, L. (2022) Food rescue as collective care. *Area*, 54, 144–151.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12762>



Volunteers unboxing food shipment from US Foods. Photo courtesy of St. George's.



St. George food shop set up.

One snowy Tuesday evening, I was helping distribute food out of Moby, the mobile food pantry bus. A couple volunteers and myself agreed to load the truck with food around 3/3:30 PM and drive it up to the Mountain View satellite manufactured home neighborhood in Lake County, about a 10/15 minute drive from the church. This neighborhood of Lake County has a Community Center space which provides a necessary warm, indoor space to lay out the food on tables for people from the neighborhood to come through and shop from. As snow began to fall as we loaded the truck, we noted how grateful we were for the Community Center for letting us use their kitchen space to line up the food inside where it was warm. We brought as much food from the St. George's storage that could fit in the bus, prioritizing fresh food. We brought

cucumbers, jalapenos, cilantro, celery, broccoli, bananas, pears, green and red peppers, potatoes, limes, a handful of leftover tomatoes, breads, frozen chicken, boxed vegetable broths, a variety of canned goods, and some leftover Whole Food's prepackaged meals and cakes.



A look inside Moby, en route to a food drop off location.

On this specific cold day, two other volunteers and I arrived at the satellite mobile-home community center around 4:20 PM to unload the truck and open the free-shop by 5 PM. When we arrived, the main point of community contact with the Mountain View location, a woman I will call Nina, met us at the community center. Shortly after our arrival, a handful of individuals who were coming to pick up their groceries showed up too, helping unload the bus and fireline the boxes of food inside. At an efficient pace, we were ready early, and there was a line out the door by 4:45PM with individuals ready to pick up their food. By 5:06 PM, around thirty people had already streamed through the door to grab their groceries.

After the initial rush, individuals streamed through, with a natural ebb and flow of their showing up, and quickly the hour passed by. Though we began to get ready to clean up, pack up the remaining food leftover, and head back down to Leadville at 6 PM as we were instructed, Nina, the community contact, became upset at us for beginning to pack up what food was left. While 6 PM was the time we were told to pack up, and tried to explain that to Nina, she conveyed to us that for the future, we should try to stay longer so that individuals coming home long distances from work could have enough time to come through and shop. The emotion in her voice was expressive of how much it mattered to her that her neighbors had access to the mobile pantry's food. We noted her feedback, bringing it back to the head operators of St. George.

I realized how necessary it is to be able to communicate communal needs in order to confront inequalities in the first place. I realized too, that without the spread of coronavirus and the launching of Moby, stories highlighting these community needs would not have been shared in the first place. Ironically, COVID actually became a reason to raise awareness about food inequalities and challenges families across the county face. COVID made the community aware

of the vulnerabilities people in Lake County faced in accessing food daily. The connection to these satellite communities and the opportunity to shed light onto their food needs would not have happened. St. George creates space for community voice, critique, and feedback, such as with Nina voicing her frustration with our packing up Moby earlier than she preferred. St. George's food initiatives work to be representative of the community itself, and in these efforts, St. George *is* community. By way of food, St. George unfolds in a sometimes messy and certainly not perfect, but beautifully organic and lively manner.

Many food-aid providers throughout the US depend on work-first welfare, meaning that in order to receive food stamps or cash assistance, one must first show proof of employment. Thus, as Dickinson notes in her ethnographic work *Feeding the Crisis*, individuals' "...struggles with food insecurity [have been] shaped by welfare state policies that withhold food from families in order to encourage work."<sup>96</sup> The bureaucracy of the work-first welfare system puts individuals, most who already face poverty, at an increasingly disadvantaged position, facing increased health impacts, financial worries, and social marginalization alongside experiencing food insecurity.<sup>97</sup> St. George, however, runs on an entirely alternative model that is not tied to state-funding or welfare food providers; they do not require any information such as proof of employment.

The beauty of St. George is that the space and its operation consistently blur the lines between being a faith-based organization, a non-profit, an emergency food provider (EFP), a privately operated institution, and/or a site for state-run welfare programs. By existing as a combination of these types of food providers, St. George does not care to attend to the bureaucracy of any state-led resources such as SNAP or TEFAP, instead making its priority

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<sup>96</sup> Dickinson 2020, 125.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 129.

serving as many people as possible. Warshawsky would define the space of St. George's and its blurring of organizational boundaries as a civil society organization, through having flexible structuring, non-governmental funding, and community based programming, has the potential to increase food access and food justice by being driven by a community-oriented moral economy.<sup>98</sup>

Because of the lack of bureaucratic demands constraining the operation, I observed the space of St. George was an isolated food oasis of sorts that truly operated outside of both the dominant market-based food system and state-led "solutions" to food insecurity. As such, St. George as a food providing entity, has transformed to suit the needs of, arguably, many more people within Lake County than if a work-first welfare program was in place. St. George's food operations, and the space it has created, is able to exist in part to the hard work of grant-writing efforts and financial community support by way of donations. There is potential for future opportunity of study to consider if, without grants to fund the US Food orders for example, the model of St. George's food access efforts are a sustainable model to food access. Should the goal be sustainability (or should the goal be to eventually end, in the hopes that all individuals have sufficient means to provide food on their own?), and is it possible to fund the operation without the support of grants and effort of grant writing? Can this space of food giving/receiving be realized as a community need, and become a communally funded operation? St. George's efforts extend to provide everyone (or to as many people are aware of their efforts) the right to food access and eliminating hunger. Of course, their efforts, though no fault of their own, do little to address the "low wages and insecure work that are the root causes of so much food insecurity... guaranteeing a right to food [does not] provide enough resources to resolve the broader issues of poverty."<sup>99</sup> While this project is not centered on the issues of poverty but the

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<sup>98</sup>Warshawsky, Daniel N. 2015. The devolution of urban food waste governance: Case study of food rescue in Los Angeles, *Cities*, Volume 49, 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.06.006>.

<sup>99</sup> Dickinson, Maggie. 2020. *Feeding the Crisis*. 155.

circumstances of food access, I make the departure here to propose a need to confront the issues of poverty in Colorado (and beyond) and the need for, as Dickinson writes, “A dramatic shift in the way the labor market is regulated”<sup>100</sup> such that individuals have sufficient means to purchase whatever they need and desire. However, the strength of St. George’s efforts in providing free food and making food available to many who travel outside of the County or rely on a family member to travel far for work, is that by offering free food, these individuals have greater freedom of choice with their leftover disposable income. This financial relief, though perhaps marginal and on a month-by-month basis, is perhaps a small but mighty fight, an alternative solution as a consequence of food efforts that works to confront a perpetual poverty that comes from the projects of privatization, marketization, and exclusion that thrive within neoliberalism.<sup>101</sup>

And so, amidst a pandemic resulting in the death of millions across the globe, St. George became filled with life. The transformation of St. George into a space of food access is indicative of the very essence and life source that food is and can be first and foremost, not just for its purpose of physiologically fueling us from day to day, but in a broader sense too; St. George has become a place where life, as a communally shared experience, was welcome during a time of social isolation.

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<sup>100</sup> Dickinson 2020, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 146.

## Chapter 4: Food Choice Freedom at St. George

This chapter examines the impact of the politics of deservingness on food choice freedom for individuals in Lake County. I offer a definition of food choice freedom through highlighting the ways in which individuals question their deservingness to certain foods or food groups. The politics of deservingness complicated individuals' experiences of food choice freedom in Lake County. I define food choice freedom in this chapter as the ability for both individuals and their community to decide for and amongst themselves what food is culturally relevant and truly desired. The process of deciding what foods are sufficiently nutritious and satisfying for an individual or their family, I came to observe, is not as simple as it seems on the surface. As people navigate the variety of conflating food inequalities in Lake County, the politics of deservingness surfaced as an invisible stigma infiltrating the community. St. George's food space, I came to observe, was a site where individuals could face and deconstruct the politics of deservingness that determined, to some extent, their ability to embolden their right to food choice freedoms.

### **The Politics of Deservingness**

I spent one of the days at the food pantry helping "police" the jalapeno, tomato, and lime section. These three ingredients were some of the most demanded ingredients at the free shop, and as such, we had to limit the number of each per household to ensure all shoppers had access to these coveted ingredients. As they were located next to the other produce items St. George offered (potatoes, bananas, pears, oranges, varieties of lettuces, broccoli, amongst other fresh produce) I observed the faces and demeanor of individuals that streamed through the line. I came to observe how, not only were shoppers facing the conflating constraints described in

chapter two that interfere with working Lake County resident's access to food, there was also the subtle politics of deservingness surrounding one's decision about what foods to pick up that shoppers navigated as well. Dickinson writes of the politics of deservingness in her research of college students facing food insecurity that any publicly accessed benefits, like free food in the space of St. George's, "are always shaped by raced, classed and gendered ideas of deservingness."<sup>102</sup> With the understanding that food choice is a process of deciding what is acceptable food for an individual or their household to eat, a vast range of racialized, classed, and gendered stigmas, vulnerabilities, and stereotypes are constantly at play that affect one's own personal understanding of their deservingness of certain food(s) or food groups. I noticed the politics of deservingness surface at St. George's in two distinct ways. First, individuals questioned their deservingness of food that was made available to them that did not have a financial cost to them by entering the space of St. George's in the first place. Second, individuals questioned their deservingness of certain foods, especially fresh produce, as being relevant to them and their diets. These processes of questioning and/or reaffirming one's deservingness of free food, occurred in the space of St. George's food initiatives, ultimately allowing for both the subverting and challenging of these politics of deservingness that so often limit an individual's emboldening of their food choices. St. George's provided the space to empower individuals to rethink, reclaim, and change their food choices in the pursuit of exercising a right to food choice freedom.

As mentioned, individuals confronted the politics of deservingness in regards to deciding whether food should be free of cost for them or not. I argue that simply entering into the space of St. George's emboldens individuals to realize their right to food that is free of cost. St.

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<sup>102</sup> Dickinson, M. 2021. SNAP, campus food insecurity, and the politics of deservingness. *Agric Hum Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10273-3>

George's guiding mission in their food operations is to "constantly confuse who is doing the giving and who is doing the receiving."<sup>103</sup> As many of the volunteers and the handful of paid members at St. George's working with the food initiatives rely on the food at St. George's themselves, a large part of their mission is to destigmatize the notion that food can only be available if you work a certain amount, make a certain amount of money, or look a certain type of way. Wrapped in the politics of deservingness are the intimate ties between food and one's emotions and feelings. In so many ways, food can be a coping mechanism.<sup>104</sup> Yet, because of what people learn through societal stereotypes and norms of behavior, internalized beliefs about cultural differences, and even targeted corporate America advertisements, food has become intimately intertwined with some of our greatest felt personal insecurities that are furthermore felt when racialized, classed, or gendered. As I used my rusty Spanish from time to time with Spanish-speaking shoppers, I began to think too about how the politics of deservingness can be felt all the more, too, when navigating the American food system in one's secondary language. How is one supposed to find the time to become an educated consumer, making informed decisions in the realm of food and nutrition especially in their second language in a food system that over-stimulates consumers with cheap ultra-processed foods and drinks? Such as is the case in Lake County, with many people navigating the aisles of Safeway, in their second language.

The second politics of deservingness I noticed individuals coming to St. George navigated and ultimately challenged were notions that certain food(s) were, because of cultural differences/stigmas, not for them (or that they weren't deserving of certain food or food groups). This politics of deservingness was challenged as shoppers were exposed and (re)introduced to

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<sup>103</sup> Conversation with Bianca

<sup>104</sup> Shen, Wan, Lucy M. Long, Chia-Hao Shih, and Mary-Jon Ludy. 2020. "A Humanities-Based Explanation for the Effects of Emotional Eating and Perceived Stress on Food Choice Motives during the COVID-19 Pandemic" *Nutrients* 12, no. 9: 2712. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12092712>

perhaps new foods that they otherwise might not have been exposed to. Food that became available to St. George shoppers came out of both concerted efforts of the staff of St. George ordering specific foods from US Foods (“We try to make our priority making available fresh produce,” Bianca once told me) as well as the serendipity of food that was rescued from various sources both in and outside of Lake County (for example, rescued food from Safeway in town, and rescued food from Whole Foods picked up weekly by volunteers). The space of St. George ultimately emboldened shoppers to realize they deserved to eat food that was nutritious, culturally relevant, and personally wanted in as much food as was available to them at the food pantries.

Bianca, the overseer and coordinator of the food initiatives at St. George, I came to observe, always seemed to be especially in tune with individual shopper’s decisions and the community’s food needs at St. George. While that tune is perhaps not always harmonious, “there will always be people who want to take more than their share of limes or tomatoes,” she once told me, as an undocumented immigrant herself, Bianca has a deep understanding herself of the stigmas and politics of deservingness the Latinx community in particular must navigate having felt and faced them herself. I spoke too at great length with my Aunt, whom I was staying with for the month, about St. George’s food atmosphere and this idea of the politics of deservingness I noticed surface when people were in the presence of food and making food choices. She’s been a member of the church community, a cook at the community meal for years, and a frequent shopper at the food pantry. As such, she knows the place well. She has long observed that the space of St. George’s food projects both changes and are changed by the people that step foot in the sanctuary. One night as we talked over a cup of tea and a bowl of chex cereal we had grabbed earlier that morning from the food pantry, something she said stood out to me.

*You know what is interesting? Not once have we run out of food at the pantry. In all of these years, not once. We still have an abundance of food. I mean really, we have so much food. And when people go to the grocery store or even the first time they come to St. George's, a lot of them go in believing that fresh food just isn't for them. There is this idea, this notion out there that veggies or fresh foods or fruit should be reserved for people who earn more money or who are white or who fit the image of what health looks like. The thing is, people want fresh food. And I think I've only been able to observe that through being at St. George for all of these years. You see, the behavior of what people choose to eat changes when it becomes available to them. The food pantry here at St. George opens the possibility of new and old foods to be introduced back into families and into their diets. We experienced this during COVID, especially. People were going weeks and months without eating fresh vegetables and fruits. It just wasn't available. And that's when we realized at St. George just how food insecure our community really was. Probably, I don't know, 70% of the community couldn't access fresh food at the time of COVID. That's why we decided we had to do something about it. We had to make food available in our community because it truly was a matter of survival. We all felt it. And I remember once when the food pantry was open during the height of the pandemic a woman came in and cried seeing fresh tomatoes. She hadn't had a tomato in months. It literally brought her to tears. And the fact that she didn't have to pay for it, well that too.*

I came to see the social environment of St. George's as a setting where behavioral changes occurred in the face of food and food choices. In the environment of St. George's I felt that personally, that I was a bit timid the first few times volunteering at the pantry, until eventually I too felt comfortable picking up fresh oranges, peppers, a rescued salad from Whole Foods, and whatever else enticed me that was available at the pantry that day. The space, though

perhaps felt slowly and subtly, surely changes each person the moment they step inside. The availability of an abundance of food that is available for free changes one's behaviors and the types of food one welcomes into their life. Knowing it is free, and then seeing it physically present and available in front of them destigmatizes in a single transformative moment individuals' notions of what food is acceptable for them. Seeing the person in front of you in line pick up broccoli, might just inspire the next to do the same. And I noticed that very thing happen. People would exchange recipes while they shopped through the sanctuary, giving suggestions on what to do with certain ingredients, encouraging each other to "Pick up some of those tomatillos! And did you see they had bread rolls today from Whole Foods?" And so I came to observe that food choice, thus, is more than just choosing from what is available. It is also a process of choosing, to an extent, who you are and how you let the community and people around you affect your food choices. Food choices are informed by what other people are choosing, what is available, and the tuning into one's own food cravings and needs. Mintz writes that,

"For many people, eating particular foods serves not only as a fulfilling experience, but also as a liberating one, a way of making some kind of a declaration. Consumption, then, is at the same time a form of self-identification and of communication. The employment of food to achieve a feeling of well-being or freedom is widely felt and understood. Much of the symbolic overloading of food rests particularly in its utility for this purpose. The satisfactions seem modest; the meal one eats in confirming that 'you deserve a break today' may be neither expensive nor unusual. And yet this act of choosing to consume apparently can provide a temporary, even if mostly spurious, sense of choice, of self, and thereby of freedom."<sup>105</sup>

The space of St. George offers space for communal collaboration, integration, and destigmatization of their food choices. It reworks one's emotional relationships and feelings toward food, whether individuals are conscious of it or not, and ushers in an alternative

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<sup>105</sup> Mintz, Sidney W. 1996. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 13.

experience of food access that prioritizes both the community and individual's right to embolden a freedom towards their food choices.

## **Food Choice Freedom**

I came to realize that St. George, at the very core of its efforts, expanded for anyone who stepped foot in its doors their right to food choice freedom. In order to achieve food choice freedom, I consider what Sidney Mintz writes in *Tasting Food Tasting Freedom*, that

...foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. [And] nor is the food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories.<sup>106</sup>

To address these food histories and the fact that food and its consumption carries symbolic meanings, St. George is guided by its goal of making widely available and free, culturally relevant food. To do this, I noticed there was a constant tuning into the community's needs that took place in having to decide and determine what foods were most necessary to make available to the community through their food initiatives.

One of Bianca's roles as the food coordinator was to place weekly orders into US Foods to arrive weekly for the free shop. As Bianca made clear to me in my interview with her, "We want to serve food for everyone that needs it. Because of this, we especially want to make sure that the Latin community, who feels the most stigma to go to the food pantry or out to the grocery store, can feel like they're cared for in the community." In order to do this, St. George's has recognized the need for making available ingredients that best suit the community's needs in Lake County. Because more than 60% of the community coming through the pantry is

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<sup>106</sup> Mintz 1996, 7.

Latinx/Hispanic identifying,<sup>107</sup> St. George is sure to order the main ingredients that Latinx/Hispanic families use to cook their meals each week. Having available each week limes, tomatoes, jalapenos, peppers, chilis, onions, garlic, cilantro, potatoes, bananas, and other Latin food staples like corn and flour tortillas is incredibly important to making available culturally relevant food for people in the community. I came to learn that without fail, each week, the ingredients that were selected first by shoppers were limes, tomatoes, and jalapenos.

In observing an individual's shopping tendencies in this space, I learned that in order for a person to fulfill their need to eat and have access to food that is culturally relevant, one must first be able to exercise their right to the freedom of food choice. Freedom, in the context of food, can mean a lot of things. For some, food freedom means the personal liberation to eat whatever they want without diet constriction; for others, it means the ability to eat whenever and whatever and however much they want. However, across many academic disciplines, food scholars have examined how consumers of today are often misinformed when making their food choices.<sup>108</sup> Corporations target consumer's psychological attention with enticing advertisements for cheap, highly processed, overly sweetened foods that often lack sufficient nutritional value, thereby leading to the context of an obesogenic environment in the United States.<sup>109</sup> Food choice freedom is interfered by several factors as people are obligated to, by and large, make their food choices amongst a market economy that works to distract consumers from making food choices that best suit their needs emotionally, physiologically, and nutritionally.

The word "freedom" implies an important and necessary degree of political connotation, especially within the United States, where freedom has not been an inalienable right for all

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<sup>107</sup> Conversation with Bianca.

<sup>108</sup> Adams, Monica & Sterrett-Hong, Emma. 2021. Creating True Freedom in Food Choice in an Obesogenic Environment: A Common Good Approach to Ethical Decision Making. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*. 18. 55. 10.55521/10-018-209.

<sup>109</sup> Adams; Sterrett-Hong 2021, 18.

people. Angela Davis once famously noted on the topic of freedom, that “The idea of freedom is inspiring. But what does it mean? If you are free in a political sense but have no food, what's that? The freedom to starve?”<sup>110</sup> I find it necessary to acknowledge that the use of the term “freedom” in the U.S. food context should be used both critically and carefully so as to not underscore the political implications and emancipatory nature of the word’s etymology in the context of post-enslaving American society where the paradigm of racialized capitalism continues to exploit marginalized communities.<sup>111</sup> How can one live a life of freedom with access to culturally relevant foods without having the freedom to choose what foods one puts into one’s body?

In my attempts to understand food choice freedom, I had several conversations about food choice and the importance of having a diverse array of food options throughout my time at St. George with several different people who fulfilled different roles at St. George ranging from volunteers to paid staff members to food recipients. When interviewing Bianca, I asked her to define food freedom and food accessibility in her own words. Bianca shared that “I guess it means everyone is able to get whatever they need. Food accessibility means that we should all have the same right to eating and getting the food we each need and crave. Food is a need. Sometimes, it feels like it's a privilege, to be able to eat certain foods in particular. But food should not be something that you need to be privileged to have. It should be available for everyone.” Having food choice freedom is necessary in the pursuit of fulfilling people’s need for culturally relevant food that keeps people and communities healthy and satisfied, emotionally and physically. In the context of food accessibility in Lake County, I came to understand through

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<sup>110</sup> Davis, Angela. 2008. “The Meaning of Freedom.” Alternative Radio.  
<https://www.alternativeradio.org/products/dava013/>

<sup>111</sup> Robinson, Cedric J. 1983. *Black Marxism: the making of the black radical tradition*. London: Zed.

these conversations that food choice freedom meant being able to choose for oneself, one's family, or one's community food that is truly desired, craved, nutritious, relevant, wanted, and satisfying.

Though perhaps food choice will always be constrained by some factor in a communally shared atmosphere like St. George (there's no possible way to supply every type of food that everyone might want, especially for free), exercising the right to a freedom of food choice is substantially expanded in a community setting such as St. George. St. George's ability to offer food entirely free of cost for whoever shows up (thanks to the grants supporting their budget) immediately makes this food accessible in a way that no grocery store ever could. Considering not just whether food is accessible and has nutritive value, but the cultural relevance and diversity in food options matters in imagining a food system in which people can truly satisfy their needs and exercise a right to food choice freedom without the obligation of having to work to provide for one's self or one's family. As such, I understand, as defined earlier, that food choice freedom is the ability for both individuals and their community to decide for and amongst themselves what food is culturally relevant, truly desired, and that can be sufficiently supplied for all to obtain.

## Chapter 5: Transgressing Culinary Borderlands

Eating food is a global process, a “border crossing itself.”<sup>112</sup> In order to imagine a food system that promotes food justice, greater food accessibility, and food choice freedom it is first necessary to see food as a thing that is inextricable from borders and bordering processes. There is wide and insightful scholarship on borders, mobility, and migration, particularly in the field of anthropology which, when put in conversations of food access, broadens understanding of how borders impact our experiences with food and food choices. First and foremost, in a globalized world, food transgresses physical borders to bring food commodities to many geographical locations all around the globe.<sup>113</sup> The physical crossing of borders by food is an important initial consideration of how food is inextricable from borders within a globalized production of food. I became fascinated during my studies, however, not by these actualized borderlines that are crossed simply to fulfill globalized food commodity production and distribution chains, but more so by the human experiences of navigating the consequences of bordering processes. Through individuals’ food choices, that food is itself a site where borders can exist and also where border crossings can take place, ultimately impacting and influencing human behavior and decisions regarding food choices and food accessibility.

A rich literature on borders notes how bordering, as a process, is the act of constructing differences between places, locations, people, and things that can manifest either in embodied, imagined, or physical ways, all which ultimately extend beyond actualized national border lines.

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<sup>112</sup> García, Matt, E. Melanie DuPuis, and Don Mitchell. 2017. *Food across borders*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 4.

<sup>113</sup> Phillips, Lynne. 2006. “Food and Globalization.” *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 35:37-57. 10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123214

Shahram Khosravi writes of this bordering process in his auto-ethnography *"Illegal" Traveler: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*, that borders exist as both enforceable and tangible border-lines and as well as intangible "invisible borders". Invisible borders, Shahram notes, exist in unreachable and elusive manners, invisible to the eye, but ever present to all they metaphorically touch.<sup>114</sup> I came to learn in my time at St. George that food is both a site and a thing in which these "invisible borders" exist, even miles away from the actual border lines of, say, the U.S.-Mexico southern border which works to distinguish geographical lines of difference, distinction, and othering.<sup>115</sup> The process of negotiating these borders, whether they are invisible or visible or an experience of somewhere in between, is an inherent act all individuals who engage and rely in some form on the globalized production of food sources (of which the US food system depends and cultivates) must face. The editors of *Food Across Borders*, E. Melanie DuPuis, Matt Garcia, and Don Mitchell expand on this idea and note that "Eating is a border crossing... The Act of choosing what to put into our mouths is a kind of 'boundary-work' in which we sort out the line between what is us and what is other."<sup>116</sup> This border crossing, by way of food choice and eating, can illuminate what borders are, how they affect and touch all human lives that depend on food, and what can happen when we work to transcend the borders in food: "Food is a great way to understand what borders do: the bodily, societal, cultural, and territorial transformations that occur as physical sustenance flows across, or stops at, a boundary."<sup>117</sup> At St. George's, I observed individuals work across borders at the bodily, societal, cultural, and

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<sup>114</sup>Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. *'Illegal' traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>115</sup> Elías, M. V. 2021. Reimagining Otherness, Recreating the Public Space: Public Administration and the U.S.-Mexico Border. *Administration & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997211059163>.

<sup>116</sup> Dupuis, Garcia, Mitchell 2017, 1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

territorial levels through the act of coming to get food from the food pantries and community meals.

## **Culinary Borderlands**

The term “borderlands” became relevant in my research to understand how borders exist as more than just geographical borderlines. I rely on the work of past scholars to offer a definition of borderlands as being the malleable, in/visible construction and culmination of bordering processes that go beyond physical borderlines to further my understanding of how border crossing happened at St. George in the context of food. The volume of collaborative work contemplated by food scholars in *Food Across Borders* paired with the seminal work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1987 *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in particular granted my understanding in the context of Lake County the specific ways in which food is inextricable from borderlands.

I borrow the term borderlands as coined in 1987 by Anzaldúa as the “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary, ... a constant state of transition [where] the prohibited and forbidden are inhabitants.”<sup>118</sup> These borderlands and unnatural boundaries, existing as spaces, identities, and behaviors-- “of which are not [physically] located very close to the official boundary/borderline itself”<sup>119</sup>-- transition and manifest in very real ways into spaces such as the culinary setting. Katherine Massoth further explains and interprets this concept of borderlands by bringing the term into the culinary setting in her chapter “Mexican Cookery that Belongs to the United States” in *Food Across Borders*. Massoth’s use of the term “culinary borderlands,” directly borrowing the term from Anzaldúa,

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<sup>118</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid 4.

describes that through food, individuals negotiate through food behaviors their whiteness, and the social and cultural boundaries that ultimately reify categories of differences between people and places. Culinary borderlands, thus, are created and contested along “vague and undetermined place[s] created by the emotional residue of an unnatural [socially determined] boundary.”<sup>120</sup> The act of creating boundaries between foods I came to learn could be as simple as one person deciding a certain food item isn’t safe or digestible to consume while the next might decide it to be safe and digestible to consume. Massoth so eloquently writes that it is “Along culinary borderlands, [that] people work to guard their food ways, blend ingredients, and/or appropriate recipes. The acts of policing the boundary between the mouth and stomach assist in producing power and justifying constructions of racial difference and political inequality.”<sup>121</sup> St. George became a rich setting to learn how individuals navigate through their food choices and behaviors the boundaries that have been created in the context of food.

### **Culinary Border Crossings at St. George: the bodily, societal, cultural, territorial**

When observing the food pantry at St. George, I was most fascinated by observing the behaviors of individuals shopping and making their way around the free-shop pantry market. I came to understand that individuals in real time negotiate and transgressed culinary borderlands by shopping at St. George at bodily, societal, cultural, and territorial levels.. Culinary borderlands were crossed bodily, in what individuals put in their mouths, socially, by who they interacted in the space with, culturally, by what food choices people made, and territorially, by entering into the space of St. George. Individuals coming to St. George came from very different

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<sup>120</sup> Anzaldúa 1987, 4.

<sup>121</sup> Massoth, Katherine. 2017. ““Mexican Cookery that Belongs to the United States”” in *Food Across Borders*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 45.

backgrounds— differing countries of origin, differing levels of education, differing statuses of being housed or displaced, differing gender identities, differing ages, differing professions, and differing economic means— which influenced shopping behaviors.

Individuals that came to the free shop market shopped for different food items. In speaking with individuals as they shopped throughout the sanctuary, many noted that they would happen to grab ingredients they might not think of purchasing at a store because it was free and available in front of them, or simply because the person shopping in front of them grabbed a certain item which inspired them to do the same. One day, I observed an elderly white woman pick up a jalapeño and ask a Latinx man in the line in front of her who had just grabbed himself a jalapeno what recipe he would recommend incorporating a jalapeño into. In watching moments like these unfold, a transgression of borderlands happened often simultaneously at the cultural and social levels. What struck me most about this process of crossing borders culturally and socially was that shoppers were continuously pulled into the fold and fabric of the profound humanness of the space that was created at St. George's. I found with my time spent at the community meals and food pantries that there was always going to be something to learn, particularly about the negotiating of borders, from the social interactions that took place between those who came to get food.

I spent an afternoon one day observing individuals shop at the local Safeway to juxtapose the differences in shopping at a corporate grocery store versus the free-shop at St. George. It did not surprise me that the sorts of community interactions between shoppers just didn't take place in the same way they did at St. George. The shopping behaviors at Safeway were very operational, similar to any other grocery store one might expect to step into in the United States; people kept to themselves, efficiently working their way through the aisles, and it quickly

became clear to me that shopping at the Safeway was an individualistic pursuit. Individuals kept to themselves or their kids, shopped for specific items they might've had on a shopping list, and attempted to get in and out as quickly as possible. The behaviors at Safeway seemed to reinforce culinary borderlands as people hurriedly bought items of food that they had on grocery lists, picking up prepackaged meals, and rarely stopping to speak to any one else in the store.

The space at St. George's pantry free shop revealed a very different atmosphere of sociality, shopping behavior, and food consumption which contributed to creating a space where bodily, societally, culturally, and territorially borderlands were crossed. For example, going down the line of available food, individuals at St. George conversed with each other, catching up with people they knew or had seen before at the sanctuary, or sparking a conversation with someone they might not have met before. Jokes were laughed at, kindness acted as a sort of currency shared between individuals and volunteers (most of the time, that is), and while certainly not everyone left happy or fully satisfied by the options all of the time, as the director of food operations noted, *"Honestly, it's usually 1 of 100 people who are challenging to deal with here. And usually, it isn't actually a problem with the food they need help with. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to, to go for a walk, or a meal to share with someone. People can be lonely here in Lake County. It isn't the easiest place to live. Food can bring people together. We try to make it known to whoever comes that we try our very best to provide whatever and as much as we can. Sometimes trucks don't arrive on time, sometimes we run out of specific foods. People can become upset but we try to remind them that a lot of times things are out of our control and we give all we can of what is available."*

Another border crossing that I was able to experience myself was at the bodily level during the weekly community lunchtime meals. People that streamed in for the weekly

community lunchtime meals, I learned, were bound to put novel combinations of flavors and recipes in their mouths. One cook noted that *“Each week, we create completely different meals based on the ingredients we have available at the ready from that week’s pantry and food order. We like to cook meals that are nutritious and that are welcoming to as many palates as possible. We understand that everyone comes in with different tastes and preferences, so we try to have a couple of different options for each meal. But really, if you’re coming to the meal, you’re going to be trying new foods because rarely are we following recipes or the same meal plans each week. It is just impossible to plan that far in advance.”* This bodily experience of trying new flavors, spices, and combinations of ingredients welcomes the opportunity to cross social and cultural boundaries too. I was able to eat, for the first time, a delicious chicken meal that combined eggs, sour cream, and poblano peppers. When at first I thought I wouldn’t enjoy it, I ended up serving myself several helpings. During the meal, I enjoyed engaging in conversations about what was cooked, how it was prepared, what methods the cook that day used to combine deliciously appetizing flavors into a nutritious and free meal. It struck me, how human this space became, and as a stark contrast, the degree to which Safeway failed to create a holistic bodily, social, and cultural experience of crossing borders. And simply, a prepackaged meal just doesn’t taste as good.

I observed two ways in which culinary borderlands were crossed territorially. First, individuals crossed borders by traveling to the site of St. George itself. By traveling from different neighborhoods in Lake County to arrive at the sanctuary of St. George, these individuals crossed informal, community established borders of different neighborhoods. Second, borders were crossed via the Mobile Food Pantry. By crossing into different neighborhood satellite communities, the Mobile Food Pantry, by way of its offering free food,

crossed the neighborhood borderlines within Lake County, which, after speaking with local community members, often designated distinctions within the community primarily socioeconomically. Most recently immigrated and Latinx families in the community lived in manufactured satellite homes on the outskirts of Leadville proper. This territorial border crossing occurring within Leadville, I came to see as a localized negotiation of socially created borderlines.

The crossing of all of these borderlands, through food, proved to be a meaningful way in which a community was created and formed in this space of St. George. Community was created in the setting of St. George *because of* the ability for individuals to cross culinary borderlands. Food can and should embolden us to transgress borders and to allow us to educate one another on the importance of certain foods and ingredients that are core to each person's identity, ultimately to be mindful of culturally appropriating food ingredients and choices. St. George proved to be a place where it is possible to use food itself as the means through which we transgress boundaries.

## Conclusion

My thesis has argued that through St. George's efforts to confront and offer solutions to the inequalities of food access in Lake County, food becomes a site and a means itself that can embolden individuals and communities to exercise their right to food choice freedom and the transgression of borderlands that perpetuate food inequalities. A host of intersecting food inequalities exist in Lake County as a result of its rural mountainous setting, dominant global capitalist food systems, and a limited supply of food sources. In particular, the limited options to purchase groceries from, such as the few corporate spaces of food shopping options in Lake County (Safeway, Family Dollar, and convenience stores) are all corporate-owned food sources that exist because of dominant global food systems that, ultimately, further perpetuate a host of inequalities. Limited food supplies and limited food sources create difficulties in attaining food that is firstly and primarily necessary for life, and secondly, culturally wanted, craved, and relevant. Moreover, limited food purchasing options in Lake County increase the price cost of food, which, when met with the marginalization of being low-income and/or undocumented, as is the case for many households in Lake County, create obstacles in being able to afford food in the first place.

A world where COVID-19 continues to spread, globally, food inequalities have surfaced more clearly than ever as many people have continued to struggle since the pandemic's onset to gain access to sufficient, nutritive food. Food shortages, supply-chain failures, increased prices, and the threat of contracting the virus itself have made it all the more difficult to get one's necessary food supply. We can begin to consider, through rural settings like Lake County, how many of the many influencing factors make accessing food, as being so central to the human experience, an inequitable pursuit. Moreover, the individually felt stigmas that surround food

choice, regardless of what the stigma is rooted in or how it is individually felt, limits and constricts individuals' already limited access to food. The contestation of one's access to food, and particularly food that is culturally appropriate and wanted, is cause for concern. As such, food can and should continue to be a topic of study and a place where we, communally, should continue to imagine new futures and possibilities in how we make food, as a human right, more equitably accessible.

I return back to the mission of St. George that is listed on their website. "The heart of the matter," they write, is that "St George is a diverse community of faith focused on knowing our neighbors through sharing a common table. The people at St George delight in the adventure of our mission, *building community by welcoming, nourishing, and loving our neighbors as ourselves*, or our secret mission: If we have food, by God we'll SHARE it!" The beauty of St. George, I came to realize, is that in seeing a communal need for food, and in their attempts to meet that need, they imagine food as a means for the creation of community. There is a potential for possibility within food when we begin to see it as a source of community-making itself.

In thinking about how capitalist supply-chain food systems dominate how the majority of the world gets its food, by and large, these systems fail to empower communities to confront the intersections of inequalities, and instead, perpetuate them. "*There's no real agenda here, no long term agenda,*" Ana, one of the paid staff members of St. George whose role has been to apply for grants. She explained to me that at St. George, "*We have funding, through the grants we've received and through the donations of community members, all for the foreseeable future. And we'll use the budget up as much as there is demand and a need for it. Until the need for food goes away, or until we run out of a budget to provide the food, we'll just keep doing what we're doing, adapting, on a week to week basis of who shows up and what they need. It is always a*

*question present when doing work in food procurement, is our end goal to eventually not have to do this anymore, in the hopes that people are getting all they need on their own? I'm not so sure. All we can do is try to make food as accessible for as many people need it as we can together."*

In seeing such a different model of food access work successfully, I realized how food is a means through which community is made and can confront inequalities. As exemplified by the many people I met who entered the space of St. George, people unknowingly arrived in community through their pursuit of food. I wrote in my journal on one of the last few days I was in Lake County completing my research about the constant tuning-in that has to happen in the church sanctuary to notice how transformative of a space it is and can have on people. People's behavior, in the presence of this food, changed in St. George. And when talking with Bianca, whose role as the food operations coordinator is to constantly tune into the environment and assess the social fabric created by the people coming in and out of St. George, she expressed how *"St. George is a place where people can give their gifts no matter what they are. If it's a donation, great. If it is a recipe, great. If it's food, great. If it's time, great. If it's driving, great. If it's a conversation, great. Having a place to come, to gather, to meet, with and about food, is really important. It gives a greater purpose to this all."* Having a shared goal, one that is out of necessity, one that fills stomachs, souls, and community creates a vibrant and lively source of connection to people, to food, and to one's self. At the heart of it, the pursuit of nourishment and how a community sets out to attain it can tell us a lot about the world and its inequalities, and the possibilities of change that can take place to suit the needs, nutritive and beyond, of all.

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