

Cultivating Narratives: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Higher Education Student-Led Farms and Gardens

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on community agriculture, little attention has been paid to student-led farms or gardens (SFGs) in higher education contexts. SFGs represent a unique site for community agriculture due to their diverse stakeholders, academic affiliations, and the institutional policies they navigate. This study examines online promotional materials from 42 SFGs located on land-grant higher education campuses across the United States. Using critical discourse analysis, we (1) map these organizations' practices and (2) identify competing discourses about community and agriculture within their promotional narratives. We identify and explain four core practices (membership, growing, distribution, and purpose) and connect these practices to discourses on community and agriculture. By analyzing how SFGs represent their purposes and practices, this study highlights the interplay between broader agricultural discourses and local actions. We contribute to scholarship on community agriculture by offering both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for students pursuing agricultural initiatives in higher education.

Keywords: community gardens, critical discourse analysis, higher education, university farms



In this study, we critically examine online promotional materials from community agricultural initiatives located on higher education campuses in the United States (Vejre et al., 2016). We refer to these organizations as student-led farms or gardens (SFGs). SFGs are a type of community agriculture where students, faculty, and others work collaboratively to grow, share, donate, and/or sell produce (Genter et al., 2015). By exploring their online promotional materials, this study (1) maps (a methodology discussed in Law & Mol, 2002) the terrain of practices that these organizations engage in and (2) identifies competing discourses about community and agriculture that circulate within these materials. Two reasons motivate our work:

Previous research on community agriculture has examined neighborhood gardens (Aptekar & Myers, 2020), city-run gardens (Prole & Gray, 2013), allotment farms (Bailey & Kingsley, 2020), K-12 school gardens (Charlton et al., 2021), or other publicly shared growing spaces (Liu et al., 2017). To our knowledge, no research has focused exclusively on community agricultural initiatives located in higher education spaces. Higher education SFGs are a unique context for community agricultural work because they are comprised of heterogeneous groups of students, faculty, and staff, some of whom study/work in agriculture-related disciplines and others who do not. Furthermore, SFGs must navigate the policies and procedures of the university context, while also making connections

to the broader communities in which they work (Sager & Petrosino, 2024). For these reasons, we focus exclusively on student-led community agricultural work in higher education spaces.

In addition, the history of community agriculture has been marked by competing interests and motivations. At one end of the spectrum, nationalist movements have justified community farms or gardens as tools for supporting the military, individualism, and capital accumulation (Heynen et al., 2006; Walter, 2013). At the other end of the spectrum, progressive movements have extolled community gardens as spaces for environmental and racial justice, social organizing, and anticapitalism (Aptekar & Myers, 2020; Butterfield, 2022). Community agricultural work in higher education spaces is no exception, and in some cases, might be more prone to competing visions and motivations. We add to scholarship on community agriculture by considering how various discourses about community and agriculture permeate higher education students' efforts to engage in farming and gardening.

To engage in this work, we identified 42 SFGs at land-grant universities across the United States and collected any online promotional materials that discuss their practices or purposes. Using methods from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2004), we ask two questions:

1. How do SFGs represent themselves (and others), their purposes, and their central practices in online promotional materials?
2. How are these representations related to broader discourses about community and agriculture?

Background

Most community farms or gardens are characterized by three traits: (1) they occupy small spaces (relative to industrial agriculture; Yokohari et al., 2000); (2) they are managed by collectives (Bailey & Kingsley, 2020); and (3) they grow, share, donate, and sell fruits, vegetables, flowers, and sometimes animal products (Boukharta et al., 2024). Beyond these traits, they differ with regard to who they involve, how they are run, and why they are established. To contextualize our own set of student-led farms and gardens, we provide a brief description of the history of community gardening in

the United States and outline some competing motivations that underscore their operations.

A Brief History of Community Gardens in the United States

Community gardening and small-scale farming have a long and complicated history, rooted in resilience, production, cooperation, and isolation (Lawson, 2005). In the United States, community gardening gained prominence during World Wars I and II with the introduction of Victory Gardens, citizen-run gardens that encouraged citizens to grow food at home to support the war effort and alleviate resource shortages (Haeg, 2010; Tracey, 2007). By the 1970s, a renewed interest in community gardens emerged, driven by environmental activism and urban renewal projects. These community efforts emphasized access to local food, the creation of green spaces, and community engagement (Beilin & Hunter, 2011; Deflorian, 2021).

Although an oversimplification, contemporary alternative food movements, such as SFGs, are a direct response to industrial agriculture. Industrial agriculture in the United States prioritizes profit and scale through large-scale mechanization, monoculture practices, chemical inputs, and genetically modified crops (Kapayou et al., 2023). Although efficient, these methods often result in environmental destruction and social inequities, such as soil degradation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and labor exploitation (Alkon et al., 2020). In response to these blights, alternative food movements prioritize sustainability and community well-being by promoting practices like organic farming, permaculture, and urban agriculture (Etmanski, 2012). These practices work to reduce environmental harm, support small farmers, improve public health, and enhance food sovereignty (Sbicca, 2015).

However, alternative food movements are not without their critics. Many agricultural initiatives view agriculture, food, and health through exclusively Western frameworks, thus limiting their understanding of possible pathways toward justice. Furthermore, some organizations dismiss or ignore racial, gender, and class oppression in their analysis and treatment of food inequities, thus rendering their work apolitical (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). Such missteps are linked to competing ways of framing problems and pursuing solutions (Cheong et al., 2024).

Complicating matters further, most research we reviewed while conducting this study focused on community agriculture in the United States, where the percentage of working adults employed in the agricultural sector has declined from 41% (1900) to 2% (2000; Dimitri et al., 2005). Therefore, community agricultural initiatives in the United States operate in a society entangled with industrial agriculture and surplus food production (Gardner, 1992), although that surplus is inequitably distributed (Odoms-Young et al., 2024). Because of this contradiction, the U.S. social, cultural, and economic context is distinct from community agricultural initiatives in developing nations, where a larger share of the population engages in some form of subsistence agriculture (e.g., Sibhatu & Qaim, 2017). Although we do not engage in an international comparison in this article, we find this backdrop important to acknowledge before reviewing SFGs located in U.S. higher education institutions.

Motivations Underlying Community Agriculture

With this brief history established, we find it worth mentioning that no two community farms or gardens are alike. Rather, each organization responds to both its local conditions and the (perceived) broader social context, particularly that of industrial agriculture and inequitable food distribution in the United States. Therefore, there exists a landscape of motivations for engaging in community farming or gardening. We name a few of those motivations here:

- **Economic motivations:** Individuals may engage in community farming or gardening to save money on groceries, reduce reliance on commercial food systems, or generate income by selling produce (Bonuedi et al., 2022).
- **Nationalistic motivations:** During times of conflict, agriculture has been tied to national security, such as supporting troops through growing war gardens or initiatives encouraging self-sufficiency as an act of national pride (Hayden-Smith, 2014).
- **Personal and social motivations:** Some participate in community gardening to promote health, participate in cultural exchange, or

gain spiritual fulfillment (Certomà & Tornaghi, 2015).

- **Liberal motivations:** Some equity-oriented approaches focus on addressing systemic issues like food insecurity or food deserts, emphasizing the need to support marginalized communities who face systemic barriers to accessing nutritious and affordable food (Aptekar & Myers, 2020).
- **Critical motivations:** Other equity-oriented approaches are more critical, and instead organize for food sovereignty and justice, challenge broader inequities in the food system, advocate for greater autonomy over food production, and expand what counts as knowledge in agricultural systems (Jurow & Shea, 2015).

The list could certainly go on, but we feel this list captures many motivations underpinning community agriculture. In the context of student-led agricultural initiatives, exploring how these motivations are represented in promotional materials is important, because this analysis can provide valuable insights into how these initiatives shape the next generation of farmers, gardeners, agricultural researchers, or policymakers.

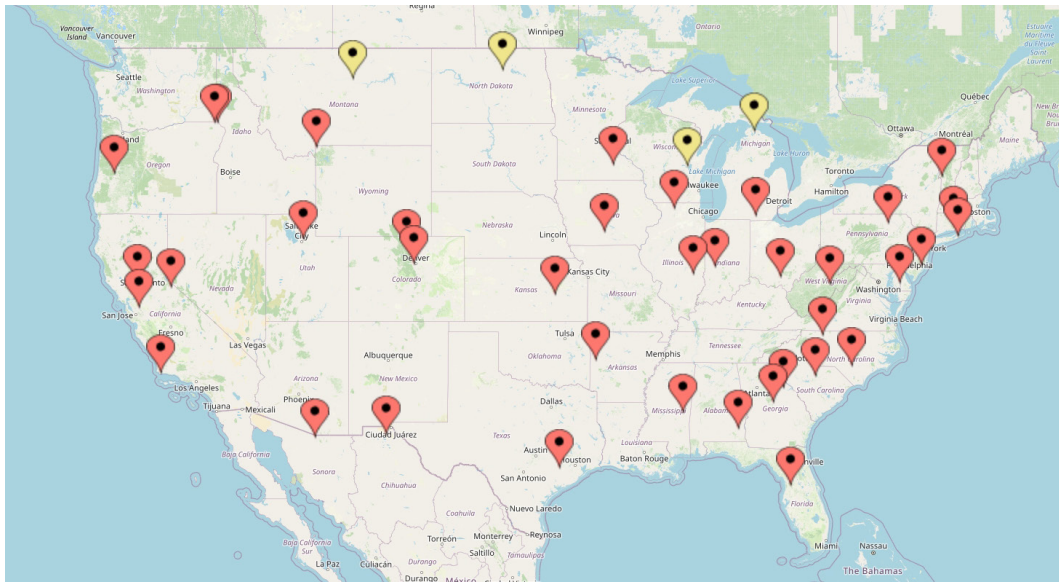
Methods

Identifying Higher Education Student Farms and Gardens

To find SFGs, we proceeded through three steps. First, we created a list of all land-grant colleges and universities in the United States. Land-grant universities, established by the Morrill Acts (Act of August 30, 1890; Act of July 2, 1862), aim to expand higher education access in agriculture and the mechanical arts to rural, western, Tribal, and nondominant communities in the United States (Ostrom, 2020). We chose to focus on land-grant universities exclusively because they are more likely to house agricultural education and research programs. This process resulted in a list of 114 land-grant institutions ($n = 114$).

Second, we searched the internet to determine if any of these land-grant universities had a student-run farm or garden. Using Google, we searched each institution's

Figure 1. Map of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities' Student-Led Farms and Gardens



Note. Yellow place markers are Tribal colleges and universities.

name with the following keywords: “student garden,” “student farm,” “community garden,” and “community farm.” Research centers and institutes were excluded, as they are not student- or community-led initiatives. This process resulted in a list of 60 land-grant institutions with some internet trace of a SFG ($n = 60$).

Third, we scanned the online materials associated with each of the 60 land-grant institutions to identify whether the SFG had its own website and a purpose or mission statement. If the SFG did not have enough online material to read, then it would be difficult to gain an understanding of these purposes. This process resulted in a list of 42 land-grant institutions with a SFG and an online presence that described its purpose or mission ($n = 42$). A complete list of SFGs and their descriptions can be found in the Appendix. Figure 1 is a map of the locations of these SFGs.

Data Collection

With a list of 42 SFGs identified, we set out to collect data on each SFG. The data we were most interested in were online promotional materials. Typically, these online promotional materials were hosted on the university's website and included home pages, instructions for volunteering, descriptions of yearly and monthly activities, photographs of the SFG, and historical

narratives about the origins of the SFG. Some online promotional materials were posted to social networking websites, like Facebook or X (Twitter). These platforms were often private, so we excluded these materials in our analysis. We focus on online promotional materials because they are public facing, designed by the participants within the SFG, and represent the mission, purposes, and activities of the SFG. Furthermore, by reading across multiple sets of promotional materials (from different SFGs), we can identify patterns related to how SFGs discuss the work of farming or gardening.

To collect online promotional materials, we read through the websites, took notes on how they were structured (home page layout, alternative links, etc.), and saved a screenshot or PDF of each unique webpage. This process resulted in each SFG having an associated set of online promotional materials that we could analyze. On average, each SFG had at least five unique webpages that were saved for analysis. The SFG with the largest amount of web presence was the University of Georgia, with a total of 16 unique webpages.

Data Analysis

In our enactment of case study (Ragin & Becker, 1992), research questions and casings evolved in tandem in response to our

analytical decisions. We describe this process in three broad phases.

In the first phase, we considered each SFG and its associated promotional materials as a case ($n = 42$ cases). To familiarize ourselves with each SFG, we independently read through the promotional materials and took initial analytical notes. Coming together, we compared notes and identified patterns related to the structure of SFGs, the activities SFGs engaged in, and the broader purposes behind founding the SFGs. To bring these patterns to light, we analyzed each SFG using sociosemantic inventory (Sherard & Azevedo, 2023; van Leeuwen, 1993). This process involved reading each promotional item and documenting any *participants* and *processes*. Participants are any social actors represented in a text, whether they be individuals (students, farmers, professors), groups (soup kitchens, nonprofits), or institutions (USDA). Discursively, participants/social actors typically appear in the form of nouns or pronouns. Processes are any social actions represented in a text, such as the behaviors or activities of the participants. Discursively, processes/social actions appear as verbs or verb phrases. To promote reliability, we analyzed the first 10 SFGs together. After we gained some confidence and experience, we then split the remaining 32 cases between us. This phase of analysis resulted in 42 analytical memos, one per SFG, that documented the types of participants related to the garden and the major processes/practices the SFG engaged in. We identified many practices but focus the remainder of our analysis on four: (1) membership practices, (2) growing practices, (3) distribution practices, (4) purpose-related practices.

In the second phase, we considered each of the four main practices as a case ($n = 4$ cases). Working one practice at a time, we read through all the analytical memos to identify different ways of describing or discussing each practice. For example, all SFGs discussed their produce-growing practices: how SFGs grow produce or flowers, what actions they consider appropriate (e.g., hand weeding, intercropping), and what actions they consider inappropriate (e.g., pesticide use, monocropping). Both researchers participated in this process, and we discussed any disagreements until our understanding on the variation of the data had been resolved. This phase of analysis resulted in 4 cross-SFG analytical memos,

one per practice. By comparing across the SFGs, we began to develop a more general sense of the ways SFGs approach membership, growing, distribution, and purpose. We report on the landscape of strategies in our findings.

In the final phase, we looked across the four practices to identify broader discourses that circulate this collection of SFGs. Discourses are different ways people can represent the social world for particular power-driven purposes. In our data, we focus on two discourses about *community* and *agriculture*. We read through each practice-related analytical memo and highlighted different ways of discussing community, nature, and purpose. To conclude our analysis, we present the various discourses that circulated this set of SFGs and discuss the political implications of these discourses.

The Central Practices of Student-Led Farms or Gardens

Student-led farms and gardens engage in a range of activities, many of which are represented in their online promotional materials. We developed four themes and multiple subthemes to describe the landscape of activities (Figure 2). Not all the activities that SFGs engage in are represented in this article. Rather, we chose four that appeared most frequently in the data.

Membership Practices

The first collection of practices SFGs discuss in their online promotional materials are *membership practices*. Membership practices describe the different ways SFGs determine who is an “insider” (i.e., member) and who is an “outsider” (i.e., nonmember). In some cases, SFGs created specialized vocabulary to describe different insider or outsider roles. For example, SFG insiders could be garden managers, plot renters, or volunteers; SFG outsiders could be nonprofits, university students, or the community. We developed two dimensions to describe how membership practices varied: (1a) inclusiveness and (1b) structure.

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness refers to the degree to which SFGs define the boundaries between who are insiders and who are outsiders. By “insiders,” we are referring to people or groups who are considered active participants *within* the SFG. By “outsiders,” we

Figure 2. The Major Practices of Student-Led Farms and Gardens, as Represented in Online Promotional Materials

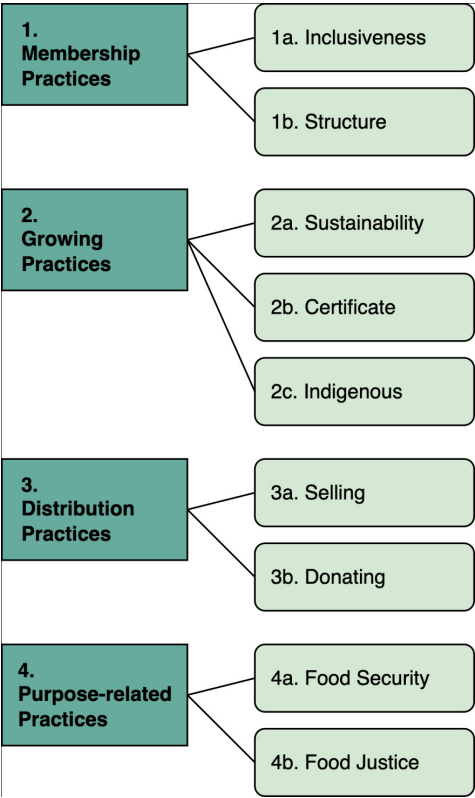


Table 1. SFGs With Varying Degrees of Inclusiveness in Their Membership

Inclusiveness	SFG	Example excerpt
Small circle of inclusiveness	Iowa State Good Earth Student Farm	Must have affiliation with Iowa State University (student, staff, faculty, etc...) in order to participate as a work share member. General interest and volunteering are open to the broader Ames community. (Good Earth Student Farm, n. d.).
	Oregon State Organic Growers Club	Active members shall be those members who participate in club projects on a regular basis. All voting members and officers of the Organic Growers Club must be enrolled for at least 6 credits at Oregon State University and pay student fees. At least 51 percent of all club members will be enrolled students at Oregon State University. (Organic Grower’s Club, n.d.)
Large circle of inclusiveness	UC Davis Student Farm	We envision a vibrant, welcoming Student Farm, where students, staff, faculty, Patwin-Wintun and other Indigenous peoples, and members of the broader community can gather to work and learn together with a commitment to developing and implementing sustainable agricultural practices and creating just food systems. (UC Davis Student Farm, n.d.)
	Bay Mills Community College Waishkey Bay Farm	Come grow with us! Spring tilling provided for garden spaces. 3 ft high 4’ × 8’ raised beds available for elders or community members with limited mobility. 1 ft high 4’ × 8’ raised beds available for all community members including those who also opt for larger in-ground garden space. (Waishkey Bay Farm, n.d.)

are referring to people or groups beyond the SFG who purchase produce, receive donations, or gain education or skills. Some SFGs draw a small circle around who can be included as a member, and some draw a large circle, encompassing people from beyond the university or college (Table 1).

Fourteen SFGs define a small circle around membership and 17 SFGs define a large circle around membership (11 SFGs did not specify the inclusiveness of their ranks). SFGs who define a small circle around membership provided clauses within their online promotional materials that required members to be enrolled in university courses (e.g., Oregon State Organic Growers Club) or at least employed at the university (e.g., Iowa State Good Earth Student Farm; Table 1). SFGs who define larger circles around membership begin by listing near members (such as students, staff, and faculty) and extend possible membership to communities beyond the university (such as community members). For example, UC Davis offers membership to “members of the broader community” and “Patwin-Wintun and other Indigenous peoples” (Table 1). Similarly, Bay Mills Community College allows community members from a variety of age and ability groups to purchase garden bed space to grow their own produce (Table 1).

Structure

Structure refers to the degree to which SFGs create specialized roles within the ranks of their membership. Some SFGs maintain a low degree of structure and operate simply

by having a small team of garden managers and inviting volunteers to help grow produce. Other SFGs create a high degree of structure by crafting many specific roles, such as garden managers, plot renters, director positions, and sales specialists. We provide examples of SFGs with high degrees of structure to demonstrate the different types of specialization (Table 2).

Twelve SFGs engaged in what we interpreted as high degrees of structuration around roles within the community farm or garden. The remainder of SFGs either had a low degree of structure ($n = 19$) or made no mention of specialized roles ($n = 11$). In Table 2, we provide three examples of these highly structured organizations. Mississippi State Community Garden offers a handful of ways to become involved, such as volunteering, renting garden plots, interning, or managing the garden. Slightly more structured, Ohio State Student Farm creates specialized positions for growing produce (e.g., production lead), selling produce (e.g., CSA manager), and engaging with the community (e.g., workshop and project developer). The most extensively structured SFG is University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative, which had a long list of positions, specializing in everything from butterfly garden management to hoses and faucets manager.

Growing Practices

The second collection of practices SFGs discuss in their online promotional materials are growing practices. *Growing practices* describe the different strategies for growing

Table 2. SFGs With Varying Degrees of Structure in Their Membership

Structure	SFG	Example roles
High degree of structure	Mississippi State Community Garden	Garden plot renters, volunteer, interns, garden managers
High specialization	Ohio State Student Farm	Production lead, fundraising manager, data logistics coordinator, production and activism outreach, workshop and project developer, CSA manager and production apprentice, faculty advisor
	University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative	Presidents, vice president, Chinese liaison, treasurer, secretaries, plot coordinators, tool managers, equipment managers, assistant equipment managers, greenhouse manager, compost manager, assistant compost manager, coffee grounds manager, herb garden managers, herb garden managers, butterfly garden manager/entomologist, bee hive manager, fruit crops managers, assistant fruit crops manager, pest manager, hoses and faucets managers, seed purchaser, webmaster

produce (or in one case, raising livestock) and the source of knowledge that informs or justifies these practices. We identified three strategies for representing and justifying growing practices: (2a) sustainability-inspired practices, (2b) organic-inspired or certified organic practices, and (2c) Indigenous knowledge-based growing practices.

Sustainable Growing Practices

Sustainability is conceptualized as activity that “meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.54). Within agriculture, sustainability hinges on three inter-related pursuits: ecological sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. SFGs who represent their growing practices as sustainable justify their specific gardening or framing practices as achieving one or more of these three pursuits (Table 3).

Seven SFGs represent their growing practices as sustainable. For example, Rutgers Gardens Student Farm, Ohio State Student Farm, and University of California–Davis Student Farm each provide statements in their online promotional materials that name sustainability as the guiding axiom that informs their gardening or farming practice (Table 3). Although each of the seven SFGs indicates that their growing practice is sustainable, no SFG provides a list of specific practices that promote ecological, social, or economic sustainability. Furthermore, no SFG that touts sustainability as its guiding axiom explains *why* this value is necessary. Rather, sustainability is

framed as common sense or assumed to be inherently good.

Certified or Certificate-Inspired Growing Practices

Some SFGs connect their growing practices to institutional certification programs, like the USDA’s National Organic Program. For an SFG to become certified organic, their land “must have had no prohibited substances applied to it for at least 3 years before the harvest of an organic crop” (Agricultural Marketing Service, n.d., Crop Standards section). After verifying that the SFG has used no prohibited substances, the certification process can take approximately six months and costs can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars (Meek et al., 2019; Meek & Tarlau, 2016; Patel, 2009; Rosset, 2008). Because of the cost and time, many SFGs use codified growing practices from certification programs without pursuing the certificate. We refer to these as *certificate-inspired* growing practices (Table 4).

Twelve SFGs implement organic-inspired growing practices, without pursuing the strenuous process of becoming certified by the USDA. For example, the University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative and Auburn University Community Garden both explain in online promotional materials that they engage in organic growing practices without certification (Table 4). All organic-inspired SFGs list specific practices for growing produce. For example, University of Florida builds soil fertility using only “natural fertilizers,” and Auburn University “encourages” gardeners to use organic-sanctioned methods for treating disease and pests. Seven SFGs are certified

Table 3. Examples of SFGs Who Use “Natural” or “Sustainable” Growing Practices

SFG name	Example excerpt
Rutgers Gardens Student Farm	Our aspiration is to showcase an example of small-scale food production that is simultaneously ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable—the three pillars of sustainability. (Rutgers Gardens Student Farm, n.d.)
Ohio State Student Farm	The Student Farm is 4 acre farm run by a small group of student employees and a faculty advisor. We focus on sustainable and regenerative ag, along with peer to peer learning. (The Student Farm at Ohio State, n.d.)
University of California–Davis Student Farm	The UC Davis Student Farm’s mission is to hold a space where students can learn, practice, and model an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable agriculture and food system. (UC Davis Student Farm, n.d.)

Table 4. Examples of Certificate-Inspired or Certified Organic SFGs

Type	SFG name	Example excerpt
Certificate-inspired	University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative	Organic Gardening Principles: The building of soil fertility through the use of natural fertilizers such as manures, compost, mulches, and powdered rock. ONLY natural pest controls may be used. (UF Organic Gardens Cooperative, n.d.)
	Auburn University Community Garden	The strategic plan of Auburn University includes sustainability as an important long-term goal in all aspects of campus life. While our gardeners are not limited to strictly organic practices, CGAU strongly encourages our community to consider sustainable methods in their plots. We encourage the use of organic and sustainable gardening methods, including preventative measures and treatment of diseases and pests. (Auburn University Community Garden, n.d.)
Certified organic	California Polytechnic State University Organic Farm	The Cal Poly Organic Farm is an 8 acre production unit in the Horticulture and Crop Science Department that is certified organic by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) with the primary mission of providing undergraduate students a place to experience hands-on learning in organic and sustainable farming and gardening practices. (CalPoly Organic Farm, n.d.)
	University of Massachusetts–Amherst Student Farm	The UMass Student Farm grows certified organic produce and manages over twenty acres of land. (UMass Student Farm, n.d.)

organic or are actively working toward an organic certification. Each of these SFGs lists its certification on its website or provides a statement that explains that it is indeed “certified.” For example, California Polytechnic State University invokes the “California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)” title on their home page, and the University of Massachusetts–Amherst explains that their produce is “certified organic” (Table 4). Some SFGs provide exhaustive lists of the specific organic practices they use, possibly to show their alignment with the certification process. The University of Minnesota provides a comprehensive appendix that tracks their pesticide usage, tilling practices, and future plans for pursuing certification. Other SFGs do not specify their growing practices and instead rely on the details of the certification to indicate what is allowed and what is forbidden. We found no instance where SFGs who use certified organic or certificate-inspired practices explained *why* these practices are necessary.

Indigenous Knowledge–Based Growing Practices

We refer to the third strategy for representing growing practice as “Indigenous knowledge–based.” SFGs using Indigenous knowledge–based growing practices are inspired by heritage knowledge from local

(to the SFG) Indigenous groups (Table 5). Broadly conceived, Indigenous growing practices are a “contrast to the highly mechanistic, linear food production, distribution, and consumption model applied in the industrialized food system” (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, n.d., Indigenous Land and Food Systems Section). Additionally, Indigenous food systems are best described in ecological rather than neoclassical economic terms (Etmanski, 2012).

All four SFGs located at tribal colleges mention Indigenous growing practices in their online promotional materials (Table 5). For example, the Demonstration Farm and Greenhouse at Aaniiih Nakoda College states that “a medicine wheel garden and several box–raised beds are dedicated to growing 17 different species of native plants that the Aaniiinen and Nakoda have used for centuries to prevent and cure various illnesses” (Morales & Friskics, 2019, para. 12). Some specific growing practices are mentioned in online promotional materials; often, however, these SFGs focused on citing the source of their knowledge about growing practices (i.e., heritage knowledge). Similarly, the Waishkey Bay Farm website has a module for teaching the community about beekeeping practices named “Nigagwe–gikendaamin da–ganaweniman–

Table 5. Examples of SFGs Who Use Indigenous-Inspired Growing Practices

SFG name	Example excerpt
Aaniih Nakoda College Demonstration Farm and Greenhouse	Guided by the principles of Generosity, Integrity, Humility, Wisdom, Respect, Courage, and Patience , we aim to cultivate a thriving food culture that honors our heritage. We believe that by embracing our traditional ways, we can foster resilience, promote healthy living, and ensure the availability of culturally relevant foods for future generations. (Nakoda Aaniih Economic Development Corporation, n.d.)
Bay Mills Community College Waishkey Bay Farm	Nigagwe-gikendaamin da-ganawenimangidwaa aamoog (We are learning to care for bees) - Module 1: Waabigoni-giizis (Blossom Moon) - May - Lecture 1: Honey Bees and Humans: Ancient Connections and North American Introductions (Waishkey Bay Farm, n.d.)
University of Wisconsin–Madison People’s Farm	In the agricultural field, FH King is highly regarded, and is often coined “the father of organic agriculture,” because of his work advocating for sustainable farming practices in the late 1800’s. King was a white man, and we know that their presence dominated not only the scientific and agricultural field throughout this time, but were the ones who decided whose knowledge were valued. We know from many Native authors and scientists, like Robin Wall Kimmerer, that Indigenous people have been farming using what we today call ‘organic agriculture’ for millennia before the word ‘organic’ became a thing. (The People’s Farm, n.d.)
University of Georgia UGArden	The concept of organic farming is credited to Sir Albert Howard, an agricultural researcher who studied farm practices in India in the early 20th century. Howard presented a concept that has since been central to the organic farming movement: the Law of Return. The Law of Return says that everything removed from the soil should be replenished. (UGArden, n.d.)

gidwaa aamoog (We are learning to care for bees)” (Table 5). This module sources its knowledge from ancient relations between humans and bees.

Although Indigenous growing practices might be expected for SFGs at tribal colleges, two predominantly White institutions (PWIs) also mention Indigenous growing practices within their online promotional materials: the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of Georgia (Table 5). Both SFGs attribute their growing practices to Indigenous communities but do so in different ways. On the one hand, the University of Georgia UGArden represents organic growing practices as *credited* to a Western academic (Sir Albert Howard) but *informed by* knowledge from Indigenous South Asian groups. This interpretation backgrounds Indigenous knowledge about growing practices and centers Western academics as the authority for bringing credibility to knowledge. On the other hand, the University of Wisconsin–Madison People’s Farm explains the injustice that is created when Indigenous farming practices are not valued until they are sanctioned by contemporary settler institutions.

Each of these examples highlights the

importance of attending to the source of knowledge when examining how SFGs discuss growing practices.

Distribution Practices

The third collection of practices SFGs discuss in their online promotional materials are *distribution practices*. Distribution practices describe the various protocols for distributing produce and livestock, grown or raised within the SFG, to outsiders. We identified two practices for distributing produce: (3a) selling produce or livestock for a profit and (3b) donating produce or livestock to “those in need.”

Selling

The vast majority of SFGs positioned themselves as businesses whose overarching purpose is to sell a product, earn money, and grow their organization. The primary product SFGs sell are fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables could be sold direct-to-market at farm stands or through community-supported agriculture (CSA) memberships. The second product SFGs sell is space. SFGs sell portions of their gardens and farms to individuals who wish to cultivate their own crops. We discuss each of

Table 6. SFGs Who Engage in Selling as a Means of Distributing Produce

Selling strategy	SFG name	Example excerpt
Farmers markets or community-supported agriculture (CSA)	Utah State University Student Organic Farm	The farmer's market is an easy way to buy a bucket of produce straight off of the farm. Getting a taste of what the CSA members get every single week. The price is going to change depending on what the average price per week is \$26. (USU Student Organic Farm, n.d.)
Plot rentals	Penn State Community Garden	As a member of the Community Garden, you will have access to a 10' × 15' garden plot and free use of garden tools, compost and mulch. We require that all plot members attend at least two garden workdays, where we work together to maintain and improve the garden. We also offer free educational workshops and events to the public throughout the growing season. (Penn State Community Garden, n.d.)

these selling practices below (Table 6).

Twenty-two SFGs sold produce at farmers markets or through CSA memberships. Farmers market stands offer SFGs the ability to sell produce to individuals based on the individual's desire. That is, a person shopping at a farmers market can pick and choose which fruits, vegetables, or value-added products they want. For example, Utah State University Student Organic Farm runs a farmers market (in tandem with their CSA program) to sell produce "every single week" at a price that fluctuates depending on the SFG's needs (Table 6). CSA programs offer SFGs the ability to sell produce to individuals based on the SFG's productivity. That is, a person who purchases a CSA membership signs a contract that tethers them to a SFG for a certain number of months. This subscription model allows SFGs to predict their incoming cash flow, rather than depending on weekly markets.

Six SFGs sold space in the form of plot rentals or allotments. Plot rentals are small spaces within a SFG that an individual can purchase on a semester or yearly basis. Once purchased, an individual can grow their own fruits or vegetables for personal consumption. SFGs typically created elaborate rule systems around plot rentals that specify which growing practices renters can or can't use (see the Growing Practices section), rules for the broader garden space, and rules for tool sharing. For example, Penn State Community Garden states that "students, faculty & staff, and State College community members are encouraged to apply for a plot," and once approved, "you will be assigned a plot for the growing season" (Application Process Section, Penn State Community Garden, n. d.).

Donating

Although the selling practices frame SFGs as businesses, donating practices frame SFGs as philanthropic organizations. Nineteen SFGs engaged in selling *and* donating produce, whereas six SFGs engaged in *only* donating (University of Arkansas, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Turtle Mountain Community College, Texas A&M University, University of Wisconsin-Madison and West Virginia University). Most SFGs donate produce to organizations, who then distribute the produce to individuals. Only three SFGs—College of Menominee Nation Collaborative Gardens, Penn State Community Gardens, and UIC Sustainable Student Farm—donated produce solely to individuals, rather than to organizations.

Twenty-one SFGs donated produce to campus-based or local community-based organizations. Nine of these SFGs donate produce "inward" to the campus community. For example, campus-based food pantries receive produce donations from SFGs, then distribute these donations to students in need. Eight of these SFGs donate produce "outward" to the broader community in which the university is situated. For example, University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative donates to community organizations like the Catholic Worker House or Gainesville Harvest (Table 7). These organizations take on the responsibility of distributing food to individuals. The remaining four SFGs donated both to campus-based and community-based organizations. Only one SFG, Turtle Mountain Community College, donates directly to families. Turtle Mountain College partners with Head Start to bring families to the garden space, educate families about nutrition and gardening, and provide bags of

Table 7. SFGs Who Engage in Donating as a Means of Distribution

Donating strategy	Source	Example excerpt
Donating to organizations	University of Florida Organic Gardens Cooperative	At every work party boxes will be set up in front of the shed to donate any extra produce you may have. The food is distributed to the Catholic Worker House or Gainesville Harvest, and to soup kitchens and other organizations that help people in need. If you have vegetables that you'd like to donate at times other than work parties, you could contact an organization directly. (UF Organic Gardens Cooperative, n.d.)
Donating to individuals	Turtle Mountain College Gardening	This program will work with 80 Head Start families (20 per year over a four year period) to provide nutritional education and to encourage gardening by distributing seeds, seedlings, and produce, as well as tilling of a garden. (Turtle Mountain College, n.d.)

produce.

Purpose-Related Practices

The fourth collection of practices SFGs discuss in their online promotional materials are purpose-related practices. *Purpose-related practices* describe the different ambitions SFGs hold for solving broader social problems, like food injustice, racial inequity, or health disparity. Twenty-five SFGs did not discuss purposes for gardening or farming in their online promotional materials. The remaining 17 SFGs pursued one or both of the following two purposes: (4a) eliminating food insecurity and (4b) promoting food justice or sovereignty.

Eliminating Food Insecurity

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a condition where a person has a reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet and either (a) no indication of reduced food intake (low food security) or (b) multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns or reduced food intake (very low food security; Economic Research Service, 2026). This definition focuses on the problem (i.e., the condition of individuals suffering from food insecurity) rather than the cause (i.e., the source of food insecurity; Avila et al., 2025; Cheong et al., 2024).

Nine SFGs outline “eliminating food insecurity” as a central goal or purpose of the SFG. Many of these SFGs discussed these goals in tandem with other practices, such as educating the public about nutrition, providing local produce options, and promoting sustainability. For example, Legion Villa Farm Stand (an initiative of Montana State University Towne’s Harvest Garden)

aims to “strengthen community food security in Southwest Montana” by “increasing access to fresh, nutritious produce for limited resource households, at a discounted rate” (Table 8). Similarly, Colorado State University Mulberry Community Gardens pairs twin goals of addressing local food insecurity and environmental issues (Table 8), although they do not document any specific actions intended to achieve either of these goals.

Whereas nine SFGs cite “eliminating food insecurity” as a central purpose, none of the SFGs *explicitly* explain (a) what causes food insecurity within a community and (b) how SFGs might solve food insecurity. Rather, they leave clues within their online promotional materials that indicate possible causes and remedies. For example, Montana State University explains that “increasing access to fresh, nutritious produce . . . at a discounted rate” addresses food security. This statement may indicate that the Legion Villa Farm Stand believes *lack of access* and *cost* might create food insecurity. Other SFGs draw connections between tandem goals of “eliminating food insecurity” and “promoting education about nutrition and healthy eating.” Although the connection is not made explicit, this statement implies food insecurity is caused by *lack of education*. Herein lies a point of critique: SFGs who focus on ameliorating food insecurity often are not clear about the cause of food insecurity, which opens potential room for deficit-oriented discourses about social problems.

Pursuing Food Justice

Food justice, also referred to as food sovereignty, is a more expansive concept than food security. Whereas food security de-

Table 8. SFGs Who Motivate Their Work by Focusing on Food Insecurity

Source	Example excerpt
Montana State University Towne's Harvest Garden Legion Villa Farm Stand	The Legion Villa Farm Stand seeks to strengthen community food security in Southwest Montana by increasing access to fresh, nutritious produce for limited resource households, at a discounted rate. (Towne's Harvest Garden, n.d.)
Colorado State University Mulberry Community Gardens	Mulberry Community Gardens works in collaborations with other non-profits to address local food insecurity and environmental issues. (Mulberry Community Gardens, n.d.)

Table 9. SFGs Who Motivate Their Work by Focusing on Food Justice or Sovereignty

Source	Example excerpt
West Virginia University Campus Food Garden	Food is a human right and the most basic of needs. We amplify community voices and grow grassroots power. We are social justice and food access advocates and act with intention to eradicate systems and policies that create barriers to equitable food access in our communities. We are building a movement that brings together communities, volunteers, advocates, educators, service organizations, and donors to promote real change. We work across systems within our networks to break down barriers that prevent equal access to food. By empowering the community in food sovereignty, we aid in creating more resilient communities that will feed everyone—including their most vulnerable members. (WVU Campus Food Garden, n.d.)
Aaniiih Nakoda College Demonstration Farm & Greenhouse	Our Food Sovereignty Initiative is inspired by our Native youth and rooted in the cultural and traditional values of the Nakoda and Aaniiih people of the Fort Belknap Reservation. This initiative seeks to empower our community through sustainable practices and a deep connection to our land. Guided by the principles of Generosity, Integrity, Humility, Wisdom, Respect, Courage, and Patience , we aim to cultivate a thriving food culture that honors our heritage. We believe that by embracing our traditional ways, we can foster resilience, promote healthy living, and ensure the availability of culturally relevant foods for future generations. (Nakoda Aaniiih Economic Development Corporation, n.d.)

scribes the conditions of people who do not have enough nutritious food to eat, food justice/sovereignty describes the causes of these conditions as well as the prospective remedies. Food justice understands that “access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food” is a human right and that pursuing equal access to this right involves “examining the structural roots of our food system” (Community Service Center, n.d., What Is Food Justice section).

Six SFGs motivate their work by pursuits of food justice or sovereignty. On their homepage mission statement, West Virginia University begins with an axiological claim: food is a human right (Table 9). The WVU Campus Food Garden next explains that their goals are to “eradicate systems and policies that create barriers to equitable food access” by bringing together “communities, volunteers, advocates, educators, service organizations, and donors” (WVU

Campus Food Garden, n.d., Objective 3). Although their description is not specific, it does indicate that the causes of present-day injustice are far reaching and political. All of the tribal colleges orient their gardening and farming practice with notions of food justice or sovereignty. On the Economic Development homepage of the Aaniiih Nakoda website, which is no longer active but was active at the time of data collection, the website authors explain that the College Demonstration Farm & Greenhouse is anchored in the cultural and traditional values of the Nakoda and Aaniiih people and aims to empower the community through sustainable practice and place-based or land-based connection. This purpose focuses less on the political causes of food injustice and more on the prospective ideal conditions that characterize a food sovereign society—one where people and land are deeply connected. This framing seems

starkly different from the approach of many of the SFGs, which focus exclusively on scientific or production-oriented relationships with land.

SFGs motivated by food justice and sovereignty provide more extensive discussion about the causes of food insecurity in contemporary society. Although there were only seven examples of SFGs who oriented their work with food justice and sovereignty, we believe these examples were richly explained in online promotional materials. In the final sections, we work to draw connections between membership, growing, distribution, and purpose-related practices to better identify different discourses that circulate student farms or gardens.

Discourses Circulating Student Farms or Gardens

In the prior sections, we analyzed the corpus of online promotional materials to map the landscape of practices that SFGs engage in. In this section, we piece these practices back together to describe two sets of discourses that circulate student-led farms or gardens: (1) discourses on community and (2) discourses on the relationship between

nature and culture (Figure 3). This phase of the research is interpretive and allowed us to craft three discourses on community and two discourses on nature and culture. There are likely many other discourses represented in these promotional materials, but we foreground these four discourses as levers for further discussion.

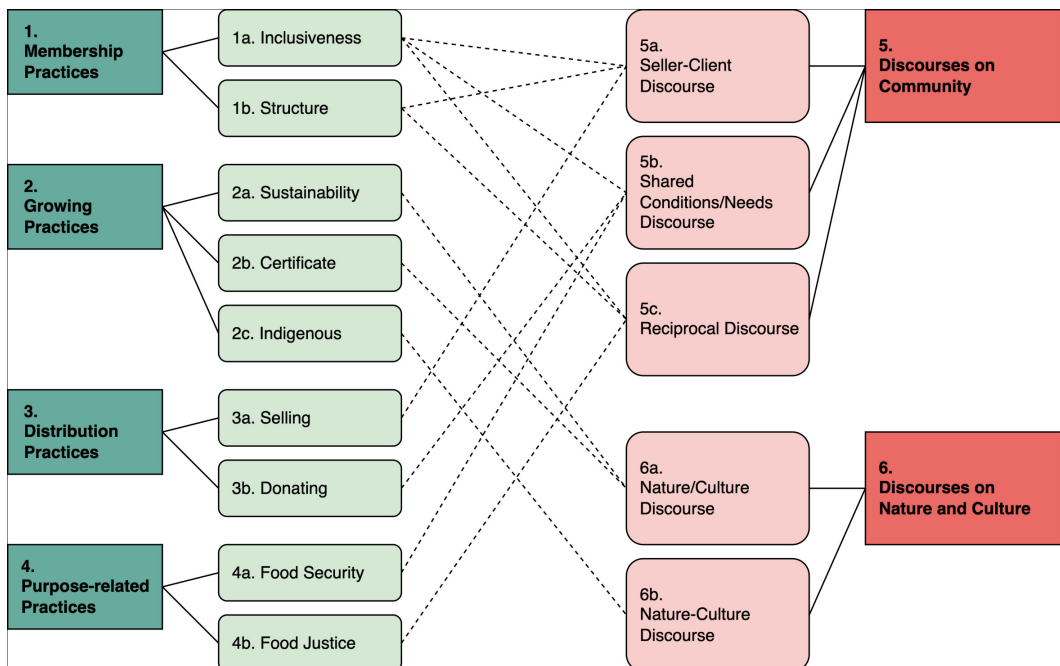
Discourses on Community

Community is, without question, a core element of community agricultural endeavors (HLPE, 2019, p. 163). However, what the word “community” means is contested, sometimes subtly and other times overtly.

Investigating CSA programs in New York City, Prole and Gray (2013) found that CSA members do not have, nor want, a sense of community. Rather, people join CSA programs for instrumental or functional purposes (e.g., healthy produce, fewer trips to the grocery store) rather than communal purposes. The word “community” therefore works more as an advertising ploy than a description of the types of agricultural work that are employed in these programs.

In a different disciplinary context, Philip et al. (2013) identified two related discourses

Figure 3. Discourses on Community and Agriculture, and How These Discourses Relate to Practice



on community among teachers who attempt to bring the “community” into their classrooms. The *shared conditions* discourse frames communities as static collections of people united by similar social, economic, and racialized conditions. This discourse is typically deployed by a socioeconomically and racially dominant group onto a non-dominant group. This discourse flattens communities and frames them based on their deficits, rather than assets. The *shared needs* discourse is related to the shared conditions discourse, and frames static communities as having shared needs or desires. Often, these needs or desires are not those expressed by the (supposed) community members themselves, but rather are the assumed desires expressed by the dominant group who has the power to classify and differentiate communities. Together, these discourses work to objectify and control groups of people. Philip et al. contrasted these related discourses with a third: communities as reciprocal. Although less specified, the authors describe this discourse as framing communities as diverse groups of people, united by a shared geography, who have different but mutually beneficial interests.

Seller–Client Discourse

As the name suggests, the seller–client discourse splits the social world into two entities: sellers and clients. Sellers, on one side of the hyphen, are those individuals within the boundaries of the SFG who grow and sell produce. Sellers are not considered true members of the community, but rather are servicers of the community. Clients, on the other side of the hyphen, are those individuals beyond the boundaries of the SFG who purchase produce. Any person or group who is capable of purchasing produce from the sellers constitutes a client, and therefore a member of “the community.” This discourse is similar to how community is treated in CSA programs, as identified by Prole and Gray (2013).

A variety of membership and distribution practices reproduce the seller–client discourse on community. First, related to membership practices, SFGs with tight circles around membership (e.g., Table 1, Small Circle of Inclusiveness) construct a discursive barrier between people within and beyond the university context. People within the university are sometimes referred to as a community (e.g., the campus community, the student community, community of fac-

ulty and staff); however, this community is distinct from communities beyond the SFG (e.g., the town community, the community of buyers, the community of people who are food insecure). Building off this distinction, SFGs who only sell produce (e.g., Table 6) treat external communities as a consumer base. Whether selling produce at markets, selling memberships through CSA programs, or selling garden space in the form of plot rentals, SFGs who engage in selling as a form of distribution frame themselves as businesses whose primary purpose is to provide a service to a client/community. These structures—farmers markets, CSA programs, and plot rentals—require and co-construct a particular relationship between “insiders” and “outsiders”: that of the seller and the client. These relationships are represented in highly specific roles, defined by SFGs, such as “plot renters” or “CSA members.” Furthermore, these relationships are made “durable” in the form of contracts that plot renters or CSA members must sign in order to engage with SFGs.

Shared Conditions/Needs Discourse

We draw on Philip et al. (2013) to understand how the shared conditions/needs discourse on community manifests in SFGs. This discourse is similar to the seller–client discourse in that it externalizes community as separate from the student-led farm or garden. That is, the members of the SFG are considered a community in and of themselves, but distinct from other communities beyond the university. However, rather than treating external communities as a consumer base, the shared conditions/needs discourse constructs the community as a group of people suffering from a similar ailment (shared condition) and requiring a similar remedy (shared need). In this discourse, the community’s ailment is food insecurity and the community’s need is affordable access to nutritious fruits and vegetables. Furthermore, the power to define a community of conditions/needs rests not within the community itself, but with social groups who hold power.

Membership, distribution, and purpose-related practices work in concert to reproduce the shared conditions/needs discourse on community. As we explained above, SFGs with small circles around membership construct a discursive boundary between people inside the SFG and people/groups outside the SFG. Building off this boundary, many of the SFGs who

engage in donating practices (e.g., Table 7) do so to ameliorate insecurities that affect communities outside the university (e.g., Table 8). Therefore, people inside the SFG are one community, defined by their participation in a practice, and people outside the SFG are another community, defined by their shared condition/need. Furthering this division, the ability to define an area as “food insecure” (and therefore as a community) is a power that only those with census data and GIS mapping capabilities hold. For example, most maps of food insecurity are produced by the federal or state governments. Food insecurity, therefore, is a mathematical way of defining communities performed by those with power to see, measure, and evaluate space (Scott, 1999). Taken together, this discourse separates SFGs from other communities, shifts the power to define communities toward governing or research groups, and defines communities as people who suffer from food insecurity.

Reciprocal Discourse

The reciprocal discourse represents communities as collections of people who (a) have mutual but unique conditions and needs (Philip et al., 2013) and (b) share spatial and/or social connections. This discourse blurs the boundaries between people within and beyond the university setting and instead focuses on the multiple social identities and interests that people in a geographic area share. Furthermore, these shared social identities and interests are expressed by the people themselves, rather than by others. This discourse was least commonly reflected in the data corpus.

Membership and purpose-related practices work in concert to reproduce the reciprocal discourse on community. First, SFGs who use a larger circle to define membership (e.g., Table 1, Large Circle of Inclusiveness) blurred the boundaries between individuals within and beyond the university. These organizations allowed anyone from the “community” (defined as people who live nearby) to participate in the work of farming or gardening. This blurred boundary was reflected in the use of personal pronouns for describing the work of community agriculture, such as “we” and “us.” Furthermore, SFGs who used a wide circle to define membership also engaged in a lower degree of structuration within their organizations. That is, there were not as many specialized roles to define

participation within the organization. Building off the blurred boundary, SFGs who take up the reciprocal community discourse often anchor their work in food justice or food sovereignty. As described above, defining a community as food insecure places reliance on an external organization with power to see, measure, and evaluate spaces. Food justice and sovereignty, on the other hand, rely on community members themselves to understand food from a systemic perspective and intervene to make these systems more just. Sometimes this intervention was as simple as designing gardening beds to meet the multiple needs of differently abled people. Other times, this intervention involved broader efforts to center growing practices on Indigenous knowledge rather than federal certification programs. Therefore, SFGs who pursue food justice/sovereignty necessarily resist frames that consider community to be elsewhere and instead define community for themselves.

Discourses on Nature and Culture

If community refers to the *people* involved in urban agricultural initiatives, *nature* and *culture* refer to the realms in which agricultural work is situated. In the broadest sense, nature constitutes any happenings in the physical and biological worlds, whereas culture constitutes any happenings in the social world (Smith, 2008). Humans have invented a plethora of methods for differentiating and relating the natural and cultural realms—each of which can be described as a *discourse* on nature and culture.

Classens (2015) outlined two competing discourses on nature and culture that persist in community farming and gardening. The first discourse is dominant in Western, modernist, and capitalist societies and represents nature and culture as starkly different domains that do not overlap (Castree & Braun, 2001). Furthermore, nature is framed as inherently good, beneficial for culture, and the standard by which culture should be judged (Gandy, 2002; Smith, 2008). We refer to this discourse as the *nature/culture discourse*, where the slash indicates the divide between the two constructs and the order indicates the primacy of nature over culture. The second discourse is alternative or marginalized in Western society but is dominant in North American Indigenous ways of knowing (Bang & Marin, 2015; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). This discourse frames nature and culture as

overlapping and mutually inclusive realms. Furthermore, this discourse is ambiguous toward either nature or culture being “good” or “beneficial” for humans. We refer to this discourse as the *nature–culture discourse*, where the hyphen indicates the continuity between the two realms.

We see both of Classens’s discourses on nature and culture reflected in how SFGs describe their growing practices. Specifically, we attend to whether and how SFGs learn about and warrant their growing practices.

Nature/Culture Discourse

The nature/culture discourse was the most prominent in our set of SFGs. This is not a surprise, because it is the dominant discourse on nature–culture relations (Castree & Braun, 2001) and has been identified in a range of other social institutions, like education, science, and medicine (Bang & Marin, 2015). SFGs who reproduced the nature/culture discourse (a) represented nature and agriculture as distinct realms, (b) identified nature as a perfect (i.e., good) ecological system, and (c) established nature as the ultimate meter for evaluating agricultural practice.

SFGs who anchored their growing practices in sustainability (Figure 3, 2a) are the clearest example of the nature/culture discourse. These organizations attempt to grow fruits and vegetables in ways that are sustainable and mimic the ecological relationships found in nature. However, as we mentioned in the Sustainable Growing Practices section, none of these SFGs explained *why* sustainable growing practices are warranted or *how* they determined which practices were sustainable. We do not believe SFGs who represent their growing practice as “sustainable” lack, altogether, specific practices for growing produce or raising livestock, nor do we believe these SFGs lack an understanding about *why* sustainable growing practices might be necessary. Rather, we highlight missing logic to demonstrate a discursive point. SFGs who draw on the nature/culture discourse to inform growing practice foreground the axiological commitment (nature is good) and background the rational commitments (*why* nature is a better judge of agricultural practice). By backgrounding the rationale behind natural or sustainable growing techniques, these SFGs incidentally obscure the social, economic, and ecological problems that underlie the need for such growing practices. Therefore, we consider

the nature/culture discourse to be apolitical in its deployment.

SFGs who anchored their growing practices in government-issued certifications (Figure 3, 2b) are somewhat less clear examples of the nature/culture discourse. These organizations also attempt to grow fruits and vegetables in ways that mimic the ecological relationships found in nature. However, rather than pursuing natural or sustainable growing practices on their own, these SFGs look toward institutions (e.g., USDA, Demeter Biodynamic) to determine what practices are in line with nature and what practices are not. We see a few important points to be made: First, SFGs who represent their growing practice as certified or certificate-inspired gain legitimacy by connecting their individual growing practices to broader institutionalized growing practices. The USDA’s National Organic Program holds a great deal of power over farmers or gardeners in being able to evaluate growing practices and distribute official certification. If a SFG acquires a certification (or at least, mimics the certification practices), their produce/livestock can be sold at a premium, and the produce/livestock becomes associated with notions of “healthiness” and ecological sustainability (Friedland, 2005). Second, when a SFG represents their growing practice as certified or certificate-inspired, they no longer need to justify *why* these growing practices are appropriate. Rather, these justifications are offloaded to the USDA’s National Organic Program itself or considered common sense (Allen & Kovach, 2000). This rationale is reflected in the online promotional materials of SFGs, because none of the SFGs who use certified organic practices explain *why* these practices were adopted. Some of the SFGs who engage in certificate-inspired growing practices mention pursuits of sustainability, but none of these organizations clearly expressed a problem with conventional growing practices.

Nature–Culture Discourse

The nature–culture discourse was far less prominent in our set of SFGs. This is also not a surprise, because it is the marginalized discourse on nature–culture relations (Bang & Marin, 2015) and more often reproduced within Indigenous communities or those inspired by Indigenous ways of knowing. SFGs who reproduced the nature–culture discourse (a) represented humans as a *part* of nature, (b) made no mention about the

greater value of either nature or culture, and (c) established heritage knowledge as the source of valuable agricultural practice.

All four SFGs located at tribal colleges or universities drew on the nature–culture discourse for describing their work. Each named their specific local tribes as the source of knowledge on agriculture. In a few brief instances, some of these SFGs recognized that humans are part of broader ecological systems. For example, Bay Mills Community College includes a module on the ancient connections between bees and humans. In what may be an interpretive stretch, we see this module as an acknowledgment that humans and other organisms (in this case, bees) are both within nature. Although seven SFGs acknowledged that their work was situated on Native lands, only two SFGs made mention of Indigenous knowledge as the source of their present-day growing practices (University of Wisconsin–Madison, University of Georgia).

Through comparison, we wish to highlight two points about Indigenous growing practices and the nature–culture discourse. Sustainable growing practices and the nature/culture discourse rest on assumptions that nature is (1) separate from farming or gardening and (2) the authority on “good” or “just” growing strategies. Certified growing practices and the nature/culture discourse rest on a similar assumption that nature is separate from agriculture but consider science and policy as the authority on “good” or “just” growing strate-

gies. In contrast, SFGs who use Indigenous growing practices and draw on nature–culture discourses locate the source of “good” or “just” growing practices within local cultures themselves. Furthermore, SFGs who use Indigenous growing practices blur the boundary between nature and culture. Instead of representing agriculture and nature as distinct entities, they frame agriculture (as well as all human activity and culture) as within nature.

Conclusions

We analyzed online promotional materials from 42 student-led farms and gardens located on campuses of higher education in the United States. Using methods from critical discourse analysis, we identified four practices that SFGs represent online: (1) membership practices; (2) growing practices; (3) distribution practices; and (4) purpose-related practices. For each of these practices, we described the variation among the set of SFGs. This work results in a map (Law & Mol, 2002) that describes the terrain or landscape of approaches to community agriculture. Working from these practices, we read across individual SFGs to identify broader discourses on community and agriculture.

With regard to community, we described three discourses that delineate the “C” in community agriculture. Some SFGs draw a sharp boundary between members and outsiders and represent the community as potential clients or possible customers. Other

Table 10. Questions for Students and Faculty Interested in Community Agricultural Initiatives

Category	Question
Questions about community	1. Who are the members of our organization? 2. What institutional policies within our university or college constrain membership? 3. Who are the individuals and groups <i>beyond</i> our organization that we will work with? 4. Who or what defines these individuals/groups? 5. What relationships will exist between members within the organization and beyond? 6. Who determines/decides/moderates these relationships?
Questions about agriculture	1. What problem do we see in agricultural or food systems in our community? 2. What is the “ideal” situation that we are working toward? 3. What do we consider to be <i>good</i> agricultural practices? 4. Who defines these practices? 5. How will these practices move our community or society more broadly toward the ideal? 6. How will you document progress toward the ideal?

SFGs similarly draw a sharp boundary between members and outsiders but use data to represent the community as racial and class groups who experience similar ailments and require similar remedies. Least frequent, but most emancipatory, were SFGs who blur the boundary between “insiders” and “outsiders” and consider SFGs to be nested within various communities in which they work.

With regard to nature, we described two discourses for differentiating and relating the natural and cultural realms. The nature/culture discourse stems from Western modernism and represents nature and culture as distinct ontological realms. This discourse frames nature as inherently good and culture as always striving to be more like nature. The nature-culture discourse is an alternative framing that blurs the boundary between nature and culture and considers all human activity (including agriculture) as within the confines of nature.

With these practices and discourses identified, we now turn our attention toward students or faculty who are interested in

engaging in community agricultural initiatives within higher education spaces. To help make SFGs’ motivations clearer, we recommend students consider the following questions (Table 10).

Although this study considered a large set of SFGs and wide corpus of materials, our analysis was limited in two crucial ways. First, our analysis was based exclusively on text-based data. At many points during our analysis, we noticed that images and video presented new windows into how SFGs were representing community and agricultural work. We believe future studies should consider the role of images in the construction of community, agriculture, and equity. Second, because of the size of our data corpus, we restricted our analysis to the four most frequently discussed practices. We did not address health-related practices and education-related practices, both of which are critical to understanding the work of SFGs. Future studies should consider a deeper dive on one or two practices, rather than a superficial mapping of the entire terrain.



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Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest and have no financial interest to disclose.

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Appendix: List of Universities With SFGs, Number of Files Collected, and Description of Membership, Growing, Distribution, and Purpose-Related Practices

#	Institution	SFG name	Files	Membership practices	Growing practices	Distribution practices ^a	Purpose-related practices
1	Auburn University	The Community Garden	11	Large inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: CSA; Plots Donate: Ind & Org	Eliminating food insecurity
2	University of Arizona	U of A Community Garden	6	Large inclusion Low structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: Plots Donate: ---	—
3	University of Arkansas	GoGreen: UARK Community Garden	2	Small inclusion Low structure	—	Sell: — Donate: Org	—
4	University of California—Davis	The Student Farm	8	Large inclusion Low structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: Market, CSA Donate: Org	Eliminating food insecurity Pursuing food justice
5	Cal State—Chico	The University Farm	5	—	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: CSA Donate: —	Eliminating food insecurity
6	California Polytechnic State University—San Luis Obispo	Cal Poly Organic Farm	2	Small inclusion Low structure	Certified organic	Sell: Market Donate: Org	—
7	Colorado State University—Fort Collins	Mulberry Community Gardens	4	Large inclusion Low structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: — Donate: —	Eliminating food insecurity
8	University of Connecticut—Storrs	Spring Valley Student Farm	1	Large inclusion Low structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: — Donate: Org	—
9	University of Delaware—Newark	Community Garden at ELI	5	Small inclusion Low structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: — Donate: —	—
10	University of Florida	UF Organic Gardens Cooperative	7	Large inclusion Low structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: Plots Donate: Orgs	—
11	University of Georgia	UGArden	16	Small inclusion Low structure	Indigenous knowledge-based	Sell: Market Donate: Ind & Org	Eliminating food insecurity
12	University of Idaho—Moscow	Soil Stewards Farm	2	—	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—
13	University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign	Sustainable Student Farm	6	Small inclusion Low structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: CSA, Market Donate: Ind	—
14	Purdue University	Purdue Student Farm	9	—	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—

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#	Institution	SFG name	Files	Membership practices	Growing practices	Distribution practices ^a	Purpose-related practices
15	Iowa State University–Ames	Good Earth Student Farm	2	—	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—
16	Kansas State University	Willow Lake Student Farm Club	4	—	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—
17	University of Massachusetts–Amherst	The UMass Student Farm	1	Small inclusion High structure	Certified organic	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Org	—
18	Bay Mills Community College	Waishkey Bay Farm	5	—	Indigenous knowledge–based	Sell: — Donate: —	—
19	Michigan State University	Student Organic Farm	6	—	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—
20	University of Minnesota	Student Organic Farm	4	Small inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: Market, dining Donate: Org	—
21	Mississippi State University	MSU Community Garden	6	Large inclusion Low structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: Plots Donate: —	—
22	Aaniiih Nakoda College	Demonstration Farm & Greenhouse	1	Large inclusion Low structure	Indigenous knowledge–based	Sell: — Donate: —	Pursuing food justice Eliminating food insecurity
23	Montana State University	Towne's Harvest Garden	3	Large inclusion Low structure	—	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Org	Eliminating food insecurity
24	University of Nevada	Community Garden Club	2	Small inclusion High structure	—	Sell: — Donate: —	—
25	Rutgers University	Rutgers Gardens Student Farm	2	Small inclusion Low structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Ind & Org	Eliminating food insecurity
26	New Mexico State University–Las Cruces	Student Research and Education Gardens	1	—	Certified organic	Sell: — Donate: —	—
27	Cornell University	Dilmun Hill Student Farm	6	Large inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Org	—
28	North Carolina State University	Agroecology Education Farm	6	Large inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: Dining Donate: Org	—
29	Turtle Mountain Community College	Anishinabe Learning, Cultural, & Wellness Center	2	Large inclusion High structure	Indigenous knowledge–based	Sell: — Donate: Ind & Org	Pursuing food justice

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#	Institution	SFG name	Files	Membership practices	Growing practices	Distribution practices ^a	Purpose-related practices
30	Ohio State University	The Student Farm at The Ohio State University	6	Large inclusion High structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Org	—
31	Oregon State University	Organic Growers Club	9	Large inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: CSA, market Donate: Org	—
32	Pennsylvania State University	Penn State Community Garden	7	Large inclusion Low structure	—	Sell: Plot Donate: Ind	—
33	Clemson University	Clemson Student Organic Farm	4	—	Certified organic	Sell: CSA Donate: —	—
34	Texas A&M University	The Howdy Farm	8	Large inclusion High structure	Certificate-inspired	Sell: — Donate: Org	—
35	Utah State University	Utah State University Student Organic Farm	6	Small inclusion High structure	Certified organic	Sell: CSA Donate: —	—
36	University of Vermont	UVM Catamount Farm	3	Small inclusion Low structure	—	Sell: CSA, market, dining Donate: —	—
37	Virginia Tech	Homefield Farm	3	Small inclusion Low structure	Certified organic	Sell: Market Donate: Org	—
38	Washington State University–Pullman	WSU Eggert Family Organic Farm	8	Small inclusion Low structure	Certified organic	Sell: Market Donate: —	—
39	West Virginia University	WVU Campus Food Garden	1	—	—	Sell: — Donate: Ind & Org	Pursuing food justice
40	College of Menominee Nation	Collaborative Gardens	4	Large inclusion High structure	Indigenous knowledge-based	Sell: CSA, Market Donate: Ind	Pursuing food justice
41	University of Wisconsin–Madison	The People's Farm	4	—	Indigenous knowledge-based; certificate-inspired	Sell: — Donate: Ind & Org	Pursuing food justice
42	University of Wyoming, Laramie	ACRES Student Farm	5	Small inclusion High structure	Sustainability-inspired	Sell: CSA Donate: Org	Eliminating food insecurity

Note. Indicates that promotional materials did not have enough evidence to describe a particular practice.

^aDonations are categorized as to individual people (Ind) or to organizations responsible for distributing food (Org).

