American Manna: Religious Responses to the American Industrial Food System

by

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Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

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Grant Wacker

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“American Manna: Religious Responses to the American Industrial Food System” is an investigation of the religious complexity present in religious food reform movements. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at four field sites. These field sites are a Jewish organic vegetable farm where the farmers begin their days with meditation, a Christian raw vegan diet center run by Messianic Jews, a Christian family that raises their cattle on pastures and sends them to a halal processing plant for slaughter, and a Jewish farm where Christian and Buddhist farm staff helped to implement shmita, the biblical agricultural sabbatical year.

The religious people of America do not exist in neatly bound silos, so in my research I move with the religious people to the spaces that are less clearly defined as “Christian” or “Jewish.” I study religious food reformers within the framework of what I have termed “free-range religion” because they organize in groups outside the traditional religious organizational structures. My argument regarding free-range religion has three parts. I show that (1) perceived injustices within the American industrial food system have motivated some religious people to take action; (2) that when they do, they direct their efforts against the American food industry, and tend to do so outside traditional religious institutions; and finally, (3) in creating alternatives to
the American food industry, religious people engage in inter-religious and extra-religious activism.

Chapter 1 serves as the introduction, literature review, and methodology overview. Chapter 2 focuses on the food-centered Judaism at the Adamah Environmental Fellowship at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT. In Chapter 3, I discuss the Hallelujah Diet as prescriptive literature and as it is put into practice at the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center in Lake Lure, NC. Chapter 4 follows cows as they move from the grassy hills of Baldwin Family Farms in Yanceyville, NC to the meat counter at Whole Foods Markets. In Chapter 5, I consider the shmita year, the biblical agricultural sabbatical practice that was reimagined and implemented at Pearlstone Center in Baltimore, MD during 2014-2015. Chapter 6 will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of where religious food reform has been, where it is now, and a glimpse of what the future holds.
Dedication

To Martie and Bill Krone who raised me to pursue knowledge and eat my vegetables.
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inclinations towards the outdoors and my best childhood memories involve reading books together, eating fresh tomatoes from our garden, and going on hikes that were much longer than we expected them to be. This project is just one of many things in my life that would not have been possible without their support.
1. Fields: Introduction to the Study of Contemporary Religious Food Reform Movements in the United States

“Then said the LORD unto Moses: ‘Behold, I will cause to rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or not.” (Exodus 16:4, JPS)

“And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna; and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” (Exodus 16:31, JPS)

1.1 Introduction

Six jars of sauerkraut, kimchi, and pickles ferment in the living room next to a bookshelf filled with books about religion, meditation, animal rights, and the American food industry. The refrigerator brims with kale, kohlrabi, and raspberries that were harvested from the farm. Jars of magenta-hued liquid comprised of the juice from beets, apples, cucumbers, lemons, and Swiss Chard brighten the countertop. Honey lavender goat cheese, still in the food processor container, cools next to eggs that were gathered from the chickens the morning before. Mismatched plastic containers stacked on metal shelves preserve spices, grains, seeds, nuts, and oats. Organic waste breaks down in a white compost collection bin that occupies the space next to the stove. The bin is almost
full. This kitchen belongs to the fellows at Adamah, the Jewish environmental fellowship that immerses young Jews in agriculture for three months at a time.¹

In 1826, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.”² Almost two hundred years later, the American version of the idiom is “You are what you eat.” Both phrases relay a singular message: our diets reveal our identities, and those identities are something more than a name. They are bodies, places, and practices of food production. However, these simple sayings do not account for the multiplicity of stories laid out on our plates. A thorough study of dietary habits has the power to unveil the complexity of consumption. The food in the Adamah kitchen is prepared and eaten by eight different people who share the house during their time as fellows. Their kitchen reflects the reality of a shared space and their participation in the program, but misses much of the nuance of their individual dietary habits. The contents of the refrigerator reveal their role at Adamah. The fellows harvest and process the produce. They feed the chickens, clean their coop, and gather the eggs. They milk the goats, take care of their barn, and move them out to pasture daily. They rotate through these chores and others that include cooking meals and homesteading to prepare food for meals throughout the week. The final products stocked in the refrigerator represent the last step in a process that takes many hands and a great deal of time. There is no

¹ Participant Observation, Beit Adamah, June 30, 2015.
meat in their kitchen. Two of the fellows are vegan, one is a vegetarian, and the remaining five are omnivores. Despite the fact that the majority of the fellows eat meat, they maintain a kosher dairy kitchen.\textsuperscript{3} Adamah is a Jewish community dedicated to pluralism in both religious and food practices. Choosing to have a dairy kitchen allows for those less familiar with the laws of kashrut to transition smoothly.\textsuperscript{4} The food in the Adamah kitchen tells the story of the people who live there and the animals and plants they interact with, the books they have read, and the Judaisms they practice.

Four groups will be analyzed here as examples of contemporary American food reformers. Adamah is a non-profit organization located at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in northwest Connecticut. The Hallelujah Diet is a plant-based diet program with headquarters in Gastonia, North Carolina and health retreat centers in Lake Lure, North Carolina, and Parkersburg, West Virginia. Baldwin Family Farms is located in Yanceyville, North Carolina, and their beef is sold in Whole Foods stores in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. Pearlstone Center is a non-profit Jewish retreat center in Reisterstown, Maryland. The chapters that follow include descriptions of what people at each of these sites eat and where it comes from. Their foodways will

\textsuperscript{3} As opposed to a kosher kitchen where there would be (at least) two set of dishes: one for meat and one for dairy.
\textsuperscript{4} There are still hiccups in this system. One evening while I was there, a few of the fellows brought dinner - hot dogs and burgers - into the house from the Isabella Freedman kitchen because a large group was occupying the dining hall at the retreat center. They put their meals onto the house plates and began to eat before someone remembered that they were not allowed to have meat in the house. The next day they had to talk to the Mashgiach (kosher supervisor) to figure out what to do with the plates. He took them for rekashering.
be treated as a resource for understanding their relationships with the land, animals, and plants. Academics are often accused of selecting the pertinent pieces of evidence and rejecting those that don’t fit their argument. I understand the temptation to do so. It would be simpler to analyze my fieldwork with a singular focus. To look solely at what they eat, or to focus on one type of farm, or even just one religion would make my task less intimidating. However, in the field I found that people have multifaceted interests, their foodways have many components, and their religious and food practices are influenced by a myriad of sources. This project attends to the complex nature of what religious food reformers eat, where they get it, and why they eat it.

My argument has three parts. I will show that (1) perceived injustices within the American industrial food system have motivated some religious people to take action; (2) that when they do, they direct their efforts against the American food industry, and tend to do so outside traditional religious institutions; and finally, (3) in creating alternatives to the American food industry, religious people engage in inter-religious and extra-religious activism.

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5 I use “foodways” in the widest sense of the word, to include all points at which humans interact with food from production to consumption.
6 In this dissertation I will use “activism” in a broad sense - meaning any actions taken in order to change the American food industry and/or provide alternatives so people can opt-out of industrial food. In many cases, related activisms - environmentalism, human rights, and animals rights - emerge as a component of the food-based activism described here.
1.1.1 Perceived injustices within the American industrial food system have motivated some religious people to take action.

The United States has a long history of religious food reformers. In 1830, the Presbyterian minister Sylvester Graham began to articulate his case in sermons and public lectures against the consumption of animal products and processed bread by Christians. Graham's Christianity motivated his teachings. He instructed his audiences that these foods were endangering their mortal bodies and immortal souls. Although Graham is considered the father of modern veganism, the contemporary crackers that bear his name contain the very refined flours and sugars that he abhorred.

Sylvester Graham is representative of the historical actors that preceded the modern movements discussed here. Graham was one of the first in a long line of Christian diet reformers. His teachings inspired Ellen White and hers in turn became the basis for both the dietary practices of the Seventh-Day Adventists and the inspiration that birthed Kellogg's Corn Flakes and the entire breakfast cereal industry. Later in the nineteenth century, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe established utopian agricultural communities throughout the United States. These farming communities were short lived, but their compatriots who moved instead to Palestine founded the kibbutzim that provide both inspiration and training for the staff at Adamah and Pearlstone.
There is nothing new under the sun.⁷ The food reformers I discuss in this dissertation share grievances and goals with those who preceded them. People have opposed the food industry since it became an industry. Graham warned his followers against buying the baker’s bread because it was made with bolted wheat and alum. Today, food reformers are worried about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and carcinogenic additives. Today’s factory farms are the progeny of the centralization of meat processing that occurred in Chicago (beef) and Cincinnati (pork) in the nineteenth century. However, there are new historical contexts, and new ideologies and practices emerge in response to these. In the nineteenth century, Graham and his successors were invested in demarcating the differences between humans and animals so humans could embrace their full potential as those who were created in God’s image. Graham taught that improper foods would bring out “animal” tendencies and endanger humans in this world and the next. Contemporary religious food reformers conversely tend towards an ecological perspective. They see humans as one creature among many charged with the protection of all the flora and fauna. Religious food reform movements have a lengthy history in the United States, but the contemporary movements differ in their holistic approach.

The twenty-first century food reformers I discuss in this dissertation identify condemn environmental, health, and animal welfare failures in the American food

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⁷ Eccl. 1:9 JPS
industry. The four field sites discussed here provide contemporary faces for the religious food reform phenomenon. Adamah is a response to environmental, health, and moral concerns about industrial agriculture. They grow and provide local and organic produce for retreat guests at the Isabella Freedman Retreat Center, members of their Consumer Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, and customers at farmer’s markets in Northwest Connecticut. The Hallelujah Diet is a reaction to the “Standard American Diet,” which they believe is causing illness and premature death. They eat raw vegan food based on their interpretation of Genesis 1:29 - “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (KJV). The Baldwin family finds factory farming in opposition to their Christianity so they raise beef cattle solely on grass. The cattle are antibiotic and hormone free and the farm is an Animal Welfare Approved organization. The staff at Pearlstone Center implemented shmita, the biblical agricultural sabbatical year, during the year 5775 on the Hebrew calendar (2014-2015). They cover-cropped their farm and created new educational programming for the schools and Jewish groups that regularly visit the farm. They reinvented shmita because the idea of a Sabbath for the land resonated with their ecological mindset. In each of these examples, religious people identified a problem in the American industrial food system that stood in opposition to their values and beliefs and created an alternative.
1.1.2 When religious people take action against the American food industry, they tend to do so outside traditional religious institutions.

In order to enact their creative responses to the issues they have identified in the food system, these groups seek new physical and ideological spaces. In order to grow food, host raw vegan retreats, raise cattle, and rejuvenate soil they need land. The sites are subsequently located in less populous areas where arable land for farms and scenic vistas for retreat guests are plentiful. The spatial requirements of religious food reformers put physical distance between them and the people whom they serve. Pearlstone Center serves the Baltimore Jewish community, but it is located a short distance from where most of the Jewish people live. So a visit to Pearlstone often happens on special occasions. People visit for monthly Family Farm Days, field trips, and holiday celebrations. The Pearlstone staff feel that the extra fifteen minutes that people spend driving through the corn fields to reach their location aids their mission to reacquaint Jews with their agricultural roots. Pearlstone’s rural location allows visitors to feel like they have escaped the hustle and bustle of urban life for an experience in nature. So, proximity to nature and access to land necessitates a removal of these groups from the areas where religious institutions are concentrated. The physical distance from that results enables religious food reformers to create their own religious spaces in mountains, trees, lakes, and fields.

A central focus on food reform similarly moves religious food reformers into the ideological periphery of the religious groups they belong to. This is not to say that
people don’t oppose the food industry within existing religious institutions. There are
certainly churches that run informational sessions about eating healthy and exercising
and community gardens have sprouted up on the grounds of many religious institutions
in the last ten to twenty years. However, initiatives like classes and gardens are a small
piece of the religious programming offered by churches, synagogues, and community
centers and they offer education on better options within the current food system. The
religious reformers discussed here hold food reform as a core principle. They advocate
for structural changes to the way food is usually produced in the United States. They
have rearranged their own lives in an effort to live out their food-based ideologies by
offering alternatives. The Adamah staff and fellows live on site at the Isabella Freedman
Retreat Center. Their days are ordered by the needs of their land and animals. Their
Judaism is innovative and ecological. Many American Jews learn that Sukkot was an
ancient harvest festival while they eat outside in sukkahs at their homes and synagogues
each fall. At Adamah, they celebrate the holiday by slaughtering goats and talking about
the sacrifices that used to occur during Sukkoth when the Temple stood. The meat is
served alongside the fall squashes harvested from their own fields in a community
sukkah that faces the lake and a mountain dotted with trees showing their fall colors.
Physical distance separates food reformers from religious institutions and their focus on
food distances them ideologically, but it also enables them to revive and create new
practices.
1.1.3 When religious people create alternatives to the American food industry, they engage in inter-religious and extra-religious activism.

In the spaces outside traditional religious institutions, religious food reformers mingle with each other and with secular scientists and activists whose goals coincide with their own. I have termed this phenomenon “free-range religion” because these food reformers have embraced their boundlessness. They look to religious and secular sources for information and inspiration. They are more likely to form partnerships with people who share their food values than their coreligionists. For instance, Christian cattle rancher V. Mac Baldwin chose to work with a halal processing plant because he believes his animals won’t suffer there. This tendency towards collaboration also cultivates innovative practices. Both Pearlstone and Adamah implemented reinvented versions of shmita. These practices were based on the values inherent in the biblical texts related to shmita, but the laws required retooling for application in the twenty-first century for a couple of reasons. First of all, the biblical shmita applies only within the boundaries of the land of Israel. For both farms, this allowed for creativity in their approach to shmita because they didn’t have to adhere closely to the laws. Second, for shmita to be fully effective, the entire community would need to participate in the entire seven-year cycle. This is nearly impossible for Jewish communities in the Diaspora, because even at Adamah and Pearlstone much of their food comes from outside sources. So each site came up with a solution based on the ecological and social principles of shmita. At Adamah, they started a shmita garden and held open hours on Sunday
evenings for the whole community. They also rotate their fields, so one seventh of their fields are always at rest. At Pearlstone, they suspended their fellowship program and their CSA for the year and cover-cropped their main fields. Shmita days were instituted for staff to give them an opportunity to rest and volunteer in the community. The program staff created a shmita simulation game and other activities to teach school and camp groups about shmita. These innovations were possible because Adamah and Pearlstone were able to communicate with rabbis, soil scientists, ecologists, and each other for the six years leading up to the shmita year. In all of the groups I discuss here authority is given to religious texts alongside scientists, doctors, and secular activists. The goal is a better food system, and these religious food reformers are working with the people that can help them achieve this.

1.1.4 Field, Fields, Field

I expected the copious presence of food in this project, but the abundant appearances of fields took me by surprise. More than once, while in the field(s), people would ask me about my field (religious studies) and my subfield (American religion). Late one night at the farm, after an afternoon spent defending the humanities and religious studies to a pre-law farm fellow, I was typing up my notes for the day and I paused to consider the teeming mass of fields that had begun to plague my work. As I brainstormed a strategy for dealing with all the fields, I realized their unwieldy presence reflected the nature of my work. Each “field” is central to my project, and each requires
some weeding. That weeding will happen here, in three sections. In the first section, “Fieldwork,” the ethnography-centered methodology that undergirds this project will be elucidated. In the second section, “In the Fields,” the agricultural fields, greenhouses, and kitchens will be examined as they relate to materiality and the study of human and nonhuman relationships. In the final section, “Contributing to the Field,” I offer thoughts on the potential of this project for religious studies, the study of religion in the United States, and food studies. This exploration of fields will serve as an introduction to my work and the chapters that follow.

1.2 Fieldwork: Methodology

I registered for the Teva Seminar on Jewish Environmental Education on a whim, so when I arrived on June 12, 2012, I was apprehensive. My research had moved towards religious food practices but I was in need of ethnographic field sites and I was uncertain of their existence. As part of the Teva program, I visited the farm at Eden Village Camp where we harvested wheat, planted a tree, and visited with baby goats. I took a class on Jewish agricultural texts with Jakir Manela, who was the Director of Kayam Farm at Pearlstone Center at that time. My discussion group leader for the seminar was Risa Alyson Cooper, who runs Shoresh, a Jewish environmental organization in Toronto, which now houses Bela Farm. I ate many of my meals with a friendly camp counselor from New York, whom I encountered again in 2015 when she was a fellow at Adamah. Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a leader in the Jewish Renewal
Movement and the founder and director of the Shalom Center, led a learning session about the importance of environmentalism for American Jews. I made kimchi, took a course on permaculture gardening, and toured a double-stacked bus that runs on vegetable oil. I went to Teva looking for a field site and found an entire world of Jewish adults who were passionate about food, the environment, and Judaism.

1.2.1 Multi-Site Ethnography

In the span of four days at the Teva Seminar, I had a vision for this project. Religious people weren’t just changing what they ate; they were working to revolutionize the food system from the ground up. That summer I decided that I would visit Pearlstone, but I simultaneously sought out additional field sites. In order to investigate religious responses to the American food industry, I needed sites that were addressing different aspects of the food industry. In order to cover the variety of reform movements, I followed the food from farm to table to discover other potential places to visit. This farm to table framework persisted and provided a useful organizational system for the chapters that follow. The second chapter is based a Jewish produce farm. The third deals with a diet retreat based on eating fruits, vegetables, and nuts in their raw form. The fourth moves us higher up the food chain to cattle being raised for meat. The fifth chapter brings us to another Jewish farm, Pearlstone, where the land lay fallow after years of production. Food is grown and harvested, consumed raw and fed to animals who are then themselves consumed, and then the land rests.
The shrewd reader may notice from this overview that there are two Jewish farms on this list. The two farms are similar, but they serve different purposes in the context of this project. They are both located at retreat centers and operate as non-profit organizations that sell their produce through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and train young Jews through short term fellowships. However, Pearlstone is located relatively close to Baltimore so their farm functions mainly in an educational capacity for the local Jewish and non-Jewish communities. The farm is visited by numerous secular and religious schools and camps throughout the year. The farm contains designated educational spaces, like a calendar garden designed to teach the agricultural seasons. Adamah runs as an educational program for the fellows, but the farm is focused on production. Relatedly, during the shmita year (September 2014-September 2015), the two farms reimagined the sabbatical year in markedly different ways. Adamah continued its fellowship and CSA programs and incorporated sabbatical initiatives, like a communal garden. The staff at Pearlstone suspended their CSA and apprenticeship program for the year and cover-cropped the fields. These differences resulted in their separation into two chapters.

It may also be apparent by this point that I don’t actually have a chapter focused on eating food. This absence is the result of a meandering search for a field site. I attended a mindfulness retreat at a Buddhist monastery but eventually came to terms with the fact that I am not a scholar of Buddhism. I attempted an ethnographic project at
a local restaurant associated with the United Nation of Islam, a movement related to, but separate from, the Nation of Islam. On the day of my first visit, a sign on the door informed me that the restaurant had closed two days prior. I eventually relinquished my search for an eating-focused group after a realization that this area has been covered by existing scholarship. What the current scholarship has missed, however, and what this project attends to, are the necessary processes that precede and follow eating. While the chapter on eating is gone, traces remain in each chapter. I munched on berries when they were not ripe enough to merit placement in my harvest box and I shared raw vegan meals with Hallelujah dieters while we chatted about our jobs and families back home. Religious foodways are about more than eating, but they are also always about eating.

In the summer of 2013, I set out on a preliminary fieldwork adventure to determine whether the sites I had identified were viable. I started my trip by attending the Teva Seminar a second time. This time it was held at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. Adamah is the oldest of the Jewish Farms and its fellowship program trained the leaders of most of the farms that have sprouted up in the last ten years. After a tour of the Adamah farm, an afternoon spent planting blueberry bushes with the Adamah fellows, and having a discussion with the Adamah Director, Shamu Sadeh, I decided Adamah would be a fruitful site to research Jewish farming in the twenty-first century.

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century. I attended sessions at the 2013 Teva Seminar where leaders of the Shmita Project brainstormed ideas for the sabbatical year with us. I had never heard of the shmita year, but once it was explained, I was intrigued. This Sabbath for the land restructured the food system to focus on the needs of the earth and those without access to food. So I began planning a chapter about shmita and sustainability. After the Teva Seminar, I spent a week volunteering alongside the apprentices on the farm at Pearlstone Center. When Pearlstone decided to implement shmita the next year, it became the perfect site to witness the radical sabbatical in (non) action. Later in the summer, I convinced a friend to join me in Charlotte for an information session about the Hallelujah Diet with its founder, the Reverend George Malkmus. We arrived early and found seats towards the back of the hotel ballroom that was set up for Malkmus’s lecture. When Malkmus, age eighty, bounded onto the stage and began speaking energetically about the need to return to a diet based on raw foods and to avoid animal products because God created human bodies to process that food and not the industrial food of the Standard American Diet he had even my atheist friend on board, though he later lost her with his staunch creationism. After a visit to the Hallelujah Acres store where we tried out the Hallelujah Acres products including every flavor of their Barley Max drink, I decided to pursue research at one of the Hallelujah Diet lifestyle centers.\(^9\) I decided I would schedule longer visits at each location in the summer of 2014. An

\(^9\) The Lifestyle Centers are now called Health Retreats in most Hallelujah Diet sources.
unanticipated ACL replacement impaired my mobility that summer, so this work was postponed to the summer of 2015. I was also able to add the final site, Baldwin Family Farms, in 2015 and I began my trips out to the farm in Yanceyville, NC in May and June of that year.

In June 2015, I packed my car and headed into the field. I spent a week at Pearlstone, a week at a Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, and two weeks at Adamah. I used my weeks in the field to fully immerse myself in each place and to conduct interviews. I wrote detailed notes in every class, meeting, and session I attended and spent many evenings recording field notes well into the earliest hours of morning. I ended up with over thirty individual interviews with staff, volunteers, participants, and leadership at each of the sites. I asked questions about their dietary practices, their environmentalism, their motivation to work/learn at the site, and their religious beliefs. In every interview, their answers determined different questions that took us in a direction I had not anticipated, but learned a great deal from. I conducted follow-up interviews with some of my interlocutors in the late summer and fall of 2015. At each site I took hundreds of photos. These photos mainly assisted in providing visual triggers for my memory as I began to write, but some of these images appear here. This intensive on-site fieldwork provided a wealth of material for much of what follows.
1.2.2 Insider/ Outsider Ethnography

The religious character of the sites I visited varies, and my status as an insider or outsider also differed at each site. I am white and I come from a middle class background. This characteristic was shared by almost everyone I encountered doing my fieldwork. The food described in each chapter is expensive and the choice to produce and/or consume fresh, organic, free-range food is one available only to those who can afford these premium products.

At each place I visited, there are people who live and work on-site. In addition, there are also temporary laborers, visitors, and participants at each site. These people are not necessarily less invested in the goals of the group, but they are active in the group for a limited period of time. Fellows at Adamah work on the farm for three months and participants at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreats stay for 1-2 weeks. Then these people return home and enact their activism at their local farmers markets, grocery stores, and restaurants. My own experience parallels theirs.

My religious identity as a practicing agnostic reform Jew remained consistent throughout my fieldwork, as it has for the last decade or so. I argue throughout this dissertation that the religious labels often applied to organizations and movements are not as simple as they appear. However, for the purposes of positioning myself in relation to these sites, I will attempt to offer a basic description of the religiosity of each site. Adamah and Pearlstone are both pluralistic Jewish spaces. This allowed me to
function as an insider at both sites. I understand the language(s) of American Jews, I share their communal set of experiences, and I have robust training in Jewish texts and traditions. However, I also spent most of my time at Pearlstone with non-Jewish staffers and a number of the fellows at Adamah were hesitant to identify as Jewish, so my insider status was relative.

Baldwin Family Farms is run by faithful Christians and a devout Baptist helms the Hallelujah Diet. A family of Messianic Jews organizes the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreats at the Lake Lure location. My interlocutors at Baldwin Family Farms and Hallelujah Diet were simultaneously interested in my project and concerned about the state of my non-Christian soul. Conversations with people at both of these sites often took on a missionary tone. I have spent a great deal of time in Christian settings, for academic and non-academic reasons, so I am quite comfortable in situations that might be awkward for others. But I was never completely comfortable at either site. This had less to do with their Christianity and more to do with their social conservatism. My ability to set aside our differences in these areas stems from the fact that our ideologies converged at other points that are central to this project.

Religion is not the only aspect of one’s identity, and it was not the main point of connection between my informants and me. My fieldwork was about food and that is how I created and maintained relationships at each site. I told everyone about my project and answered their often exhaustive questions about my research. And whether I
was helping to grow it, pick it, process it, or cook it, my participant-observation was all about the food. In the realm of food, my beliefs and practices proved susceptible to the influence of my ethnographic and written sources. About three years ago, when I was deeply engaged in researching nineteenth century diet reform movements, I started making my own bread and began drinking all of my water at room temperature. In the summer of 2014, when I was researching shmita, I embarked upon a canning and pickling project that took over my days and my kitchen for about a month. I was about seven flavors and fifty jars of jam into this experiment before I connected it to the focus on preservation in the shmita literature I was reading. On a day spent drafting the third chapter, I looked down and noticed that the cold-processed (raw) vegetable juice was similar to the one I drank numerous times at the health retreat. I became a vegetarian in the midst of an attempt to read all of the current literature about the American food industry four years ago. I became a vegan on June 21, 2015, the first day of the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat. During the retreat, all participants follow the Hallelujah Diet, which involved veganism and abstention from caffeine and alcohol. It took me four weeks to wean down my coffee intake so I could participate fully. While at the retreat, I noticed that I felt energized without coffee and that my digestive system was running smoothly so I decided to keep up the vegan diet at my next field site, Adamah. It proved to be an easy transition. There was a vegan option at every meal. By the time I left Adamah, the dairy and eggs I had stopped eating had also ceased to appeal to me.
Veganism set in. As a dutiful food studies scholar, I note these dietary changes with the caveat that this is my past and current situation. I don’t dare imagine what I will or won’t be eating in the future. I don’t believe that my changing food practices are unique, and the fact that they are not is a basic assumption of this project.

1.2.3 History

My own food practices are dynamic and subject to external influence; the same applies to my interlocutors in the field. I attend to the historical lineages and cultural contexts that enable and inspire the religious food reform movements described here. I investigate the aspects of industrial food that motivated them to action, and the familiar character of their responses. Religious food reform is not a new phenomenon. A storied lineage precedes the modern movements.

In order to properly contextualize these groups and consider their historical predecessors, my ethnography is supplemented by printed materials produced by these sites, and sources that were mentioned in those printed materials and in classes and conversations. I have been on email and mailing lists for these sites since 2013, which provided an overabundance of prescriptive and promotional material. I examined the secondary sources written about these and similar sites, and the primary and secondary literature that provides historical context for these groups.

Scripture pervades the literature these groups produce and the everyday speech of many of my interlocutors. Their reliance on biblical and rabbinic texts required my
own engagement with these texts. For example, in order to understand the exegesis of Genesis that resulted in a raw vegan diet, I had to spend a great deal of time working with the text itself alongside George Malkmus’s writings. I do not analyze the exegeses of the leaders and educators at these sites, nor the theologies that they adhere to, because I am not interested in judging the efficacy of their engagements with traditions and texts. What I am interested in are the foodways that result from these engagements and the role of those foodways in the lives of the religious people who participate in them. Discussions of related scriptural interpretations and their historical lineages are included here, with the understanding that these may inform, inspire, or simply mirror those that provide the foundation for the practices described here. I attend to both the history and the scriptural interpretations of these groups, but I do so with the goal of providing a comprehensive picture of their current foodways.

1.2.4 Lived Religion

It is probably clear by now that this is not a typical anthropological project. I did not spend a year or two or three in the field. And, while I consider both history and historical context, this is also not a cultural history of religious food reform movements. Ethnography and history are tools that I find particularly useful, but they are not the only ones in my box. This is, above all, a religious studies project and it seeks to answer questions pertinent to that discipline by using tools borrowed from others. Ethnography, in particular, allows me to investigate foodways through the lens of lived religion. When
people ask me what I study, and I say “religion and food,” they most often respond with
some version of “Oh, like kosher and stuff.” If the situation is appropriate, I tell them
that I am interested in kashrut, but that I consider how people are interpreting and
reinterpreting kashrut on individual and communal levels in relation to their concerns
about food production in the United States. In other words, I analyze in the everyday
negotiations that religious Americans engage in when they are deciding what to eat. The
formal systems and rituals associated with religious foodways do not receive much
attention in this dissertation. Instead, I describe the practices that reflect a consideration
of traditional religious foodways alongside information about industrial food that calls
those traditional religious foodways into question. Roasted chicken as the main dish for
Shabbat dinner is such an ingrained tradition in American Jewish homes that some Jews
consider it a requirement. Chicken is halakhically kosher as long as the animal is clean
and the slaughter is done properly. But is the meat kosher if the chicken spent its life in a
crowded field house where its beak was clipped so it wouldn’t peck at other birds,
where it was pumped with antibiotics to stave off inevitable infections, and where it had
no access to the outdoors? The laws of kashrut are stable, but the practice of kashrut is
not. I am interested in the moments when religious beliefs and traditions are considered
alongside evidence from environmental, animal, and food scientists and the practices
that emerge.
For the reasons described above, I utilize the lived religion approach developed and popularized by David Hall and Robert Orsi to study contemporary religious food reformers. Orsi defines lived religion in his book *Between Heaven and Earth* as “religion as people actually do and imagine it in the circumstances of their everyday lives.”¹⁰ This is neither the religion authorized by churches nor the practices enacted at Saturday morning synagogues. This is the religion that informs daily decisions about what to eat, inspires major changes in diet or lifestyle, and enables new practices when the old ones are misaligned with people’s beliefs and ethics. Orsi describes lived religion elsewhere as “religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be.”¹¹ This gets at the heart of the religion described here. By studying people who are producing, preparing, and consuming food, I am studying religion-in-action, the relationships formed when religion is enacted, and religion that is aimed at making the world that is into the one they imagine it can be. And like Orsi, I want to stress that my study of lived religion is not about practice instead of ideas, but about ideas in practice.¹² Food offers a beneficial locus for the study of how religious and political ideologies are enacted in mundane life. Anthropologists have been studying foodways since the mid twentieth century.

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work of Mary Douglas, Carole Counihan, and Sidney Mintz were particularly useful as I planned my ethnographic work.\textsuperscript{13} Scholars like R. Marie Griffith, Courtney Bender, and Samira Mehta provided examples of how to bring lived religion and anthropological approaches to the study of food together in productive ways.\textsuperscript{14} The result of my engagement with the work of these scholars and my interlocutors is a study of lived religious foodways.

1.3 In the Fields

When I was at Pearlstone in the summer of 2015, the land was released for a year of rest and rejuvenation, but the humans on site remained hard at work. The nature of the sabbatical year allowed Pearlstone to engage in future-focused attention to the land. When I was on site we spent most of our days in the riparian zone - the area around the stream that lies between the cultivated farmland and the rolling hills of the retreat center. Most of our attention was focused on removing invasive species from the zone in an effort to restore the local ecologies. Many of the conversations I had with Shelby, the Chesapeake Conservation Corps Volunteer assigned to Pearlstone for the year, related to

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the designation “invasive species” and the actions taken against plants once they were determined to be invasive. The “invasive” language was invoked to describe different species in the riparian zone and in the farmland areas. In the riparian zone, any plant that is not native to central Maryland is considered invasive. On the farm, any species that was not planted intentionally by the humans who work the land is considered invasive. So, the designation “invasive species” is not static. The buckwheat, barley, and oat plants that were used to cover crop the fields during the shmita year will be considered invasive if they sprout up next summer in a row of carefully planted zucchinis. In the riparian zone both barley and zucchini would be designated as invasive species. From this brief description, it becomes clear that humans are controlling this land with a heavy hand. The plants that live under their relatively beneficent rule are subject to removal simply for existing on the wrong quarter-acre of land. And, after many hours spent attempting to trim or remove these intruders, it became clear that they were filled with willful vitality. The thistle bushes, which were losing their buds to the blades of my scissors left their mark on my arms in the form of long red, criss-crossed scratches. A bright orange dodder species was spreading quickly through the zone, which resulted in a newly instituted rule to check our shoes for specks of orange before we walked from the zone to the farm so it wouldn’t spread there. A day-long battle with honeysuckle left the staff and volunteers so exhausted that we ended up spending the next day harvesting and hanging lavender to give our worn bodies a
break. When humans engage in food production, they enter a world that does not belong solely to them. And while humans still manage to exert an extraordinary amount of power over the natural world, the living species subsumed under their control persist in their efforts to live and thrive.

This is an undeniably anthropocentric project. I study religion and the human beings that express religion through their foodways. However, I strive to attend to the living species that populate every point in the resulting food systems. I cannot decenter the human, but I can bring plants and animals into the center and complicate the human domination of the natural world that is too often assumed. So, this is not just a multi-site ethnography, it is a multi-species ethnography. I studied humans, but I also studied the plants and animals that shared and shaped their daily lives. In general, I describe the areas where religion is mediating the relationships between humans and other species within the food system. These relationships occur on micro and macro levels. At the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, participants are reordering their lives to repair their internal ecosystems and restore the health of their gut microbes, cells, and bacteria. On a much wider scale, the staff and volunteers at Pearlstone are trying to restore native Maryland ecologies and the healthy soil that will allow them to grow fruit and vegetables in the years to come.

My attention to plants and animals has brought me into conversations about religion and materiality. As I spent time in fields and kitchens in the complex human
and nonhuman ecologies of food systems, the relationship between my project and materiality changed. I became less comfortable with the designation of “matter” as a descriptor for the nonhuman things that the religious people I study engage with on a daily basis. In what follows, I will discuss both the relevant aspects of the materiality conversation that informed my project and the concerns raised by my interactions with nonhumans in the fields.

1.3.1 Materiality

In the introduction to Religion and Material Culture, David Morgan argues that belief is best understood when it is observed in the embodied practices that express it. He moves belief out the mind and into the material world. Morgan suggests, “religious material culture consists of the objects, spaces, practices, and ideas in which belief takes shape.” 15 Given the fact that I study food and all of the objects, spaces, and practices that enable its production and consumption, materiality is a natural fit for my work. For the groups discussed here, food allows them to enact their relationship with the divine and their religious traditions throughout the day. Morgan describes a similar phenomenon with images, noting that an image is an “agent in constructing and negotiating relations among different parties” – heaven, earth, individuals, groups, places, and things. 16 I hope that my work will add to the study of materiality in two ways. First, materiality

has recently included attention to food and food paraphernalia, but this area needs
further exploration. My research adds to this conversation a focus on food before it
becomes food. As a finished product, food certainly acts upon humans and enables them
to relate to the divine in a variety of ways—such as sacrificial offering in ancient
Judaism, as sacrament in Christianity, or as the blessed result of ritual offering, prasad,
in Hinduism. But the acts of growing, harvesting, and preparing foods also perform
similar work. Second, religious practices engage humans and materials through
embodied practices. Food is an advantageous material for the study of these embodied
practices.Humans employ bodily techniques to grow and prepare food. Humans also
consume food, so food meets its end when it physically enters bodies and becomes part
of their internal ecologies. Finally, I discuss materiality here as a dynamic process. Many
human and non-human actors are engaged in the process of turning plants and animals
into food. “Food” is not a stable category, nor does it signify a static material object. My
research attends to each material state that food embodies in its journey from farms to
stomachs. These three areas will be discussed further below.

Food is a prime candidate for materiality studies because it engages all five
human senses. It is seen, touched, smelled, heard, and tasted. Significant work has been
done on the visual engagement with material culture and that work provides helpful
scaffolding for this dissertation. In The Embodied Eye, David Morgan describes the gaze
as “a recognizable pattern that operates until some aspect within or beyond its structure
changes and a different visual field emerges. This idea of a dynamic gaze may be extended into the realm of food studies. Moreover, Morgan treats any gaze as always integrated into the human body and not as a purely visual phenomenon. A gaze is a set of relationships mediated by looking, yet seeing always unfolds in tandem with other forms of sensation—feeling, hearing, touching, and often tasting. Accordingly, food is not simply what we eat, but also what we touch, look at, long for, imagine, and smell.

Humans spend a great deal of time deciding what counts as “food.” At the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, we were taught to stop seeing animal products and processed items as food. Instead, we were encouraged to change the way we think about what counts as food. This lesson stayed with me after I left the retreat center. After a few weeks as a vegan, I stopped seeing eggs and cheese as food. The pattern of my gaze has been altered and my brain is no longer processing those items as things I can eat to sustain my body. Morgan delineates the various types of gazes. The reciprocal gaze is most useful here because it is a two-way gaze between human and divine viewers. Humans in the chapters that follow gaze upon farms, fowls, and foods and see the divine. There is a hope among many of those humans that the divine will, in turn, see them and grant them a bountiful crop or bodily health. The liminal gaze, that which sees the limits that mark the end of one’s world and the beginning of another, is also useful here. Each

18 Morgan, The Embodied Eye, 73.
group discussed in this dissertation gazes upon the processed food at grocery stores and sees something that others eat that is not fit for their consumption. They gaze upon boxes of dried pasta and neon powdered cheese and see an inferior product, and one that may or may not be classified as “food” in their world. Throughout this dissertation, my interlocutors are found altering their visual fields as they enact their values and determine what they will and will not eat. In many cases, this means growing the food themselves, which adds another dimension of materiality to my study.

Humans engage materials with their bodies and changing relationships with materials require new bodily practices. In the chapters that follow, I will show how humans embody their religious ideals as they interact with various materials related to food production on a daily basis. In “Techniques of the Body,” Marcel Mauss argues that bodily disciplines are socially constructed.\(^{19}\) When human change what they eat or decide to participate in the food production process, they have to re-teach their body new disciplines. They have to learn how to use new tools and their bodies must become accustomed to new positions. Mauss cites squatting as a technique that children possess but adults lose the ability to squat as they age.\(^{20}\) My own body has not regularly squatted in many years. It took a few days for my body to adjust before I was able to squat in between rows of vegetables and weed for extended periods of time. Even then, I


had to stand up and stretch my legs frequently. Squatting is a necessary practice for adults involved in farming and the young farmers at Adamah and Pearlstone had to retrain their bodies in this technique in order to grow food without the chemicals that they oppose. Organic farming requires a lot of weeding. And if weeding is going to be effective, it has to happen frequently and efficiently. Squatting allows one to keep moving without standing up and sitting down every few feet. Squatting also allows humans to reach into the planted areas to pull weeds without damaging the plants that reside there. Participation in all of the material ecologies that I discuss in this dissertation required the acquisition of new techniques of the body that allowed me to be in right relationship with the non-humans and humans around me. And, as mentioned above, food is also literally embodied when it is consumed and then biological techniques of the body take over. Food is digested and broken down into elements that the body uses to continue its engagement with the outside world.

It should be clear by now that “food” is a dynamic category. Materials move through stages of being not-food, then food, and then not-food once more. For example, a tomato is not food when it is small and hard and green on the vine. Then it is food when it is ripe and red and sitting on a kitchen countertop. But if a few days pass the tomato will turn soft and brown and lose its status as food. David Morgan proposes a useful framework for discussing the dynamic conceptualization of materials in his article “The Ecology of Images.” He explains “[i]mages are instruments that connect
bodies to places and to one another, productively integrating humans into their physical and social ecologies.”21 This model of how images act in assemblages is useful when extended to other materials. Morgan uses the cotton value chain as an example of this transient shaped assemblage,22 noting how cotton, humans, and machines connect at various points in the process. Here, I will provide descriptions of food value chains and the assemblages that engender them. I will be attentive to the different relationships between human and nonhuman actors at each point in this chain.

In busy kitchens and neatly planted rows of squash humans, tools, plants, and microorganisms come together to produce food. A deeply embodied relationship with materials is evidenced throughout this dissertation. Food, no matter where it comes from, is the product of a vast assemblage of humans and non-humans that connect at different points to accomplish one particular aspect of the process that turns raw materials into food and subsequently into the energy that helps bodies act in the world. Materiality is useful method and it provides a framework for attending to the materials embedded within this project. However, there are issues that arise when applying materiality to food production. Where do living plants and animals fit within the study of material culture? They engage in many of the behaviors that came to define the study of materiality. They see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. So, given the nature of the

materials described here, I will also utilize the work of a few scholars who have theorized assemblages that incorporate humans, living non-human actors, and non-living non-human actors.

1.3.2 Vital Materiality

Jane Bennett attends to vital material in her book *Vibrant Matter*, which adds much needed nuance to the human/material binary. She amends the human category to include other living things in her discussion of the scholarly habit of “parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)”\(^\text{23}\) She attributes vitality to the things that have the capacity “not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”\(^\text{24}\) This is helpful when one’s research attends to plants and animals that do not necessarily want to grow, live, or act in the ways that humans desire. Bennett also addresses Hodder’s concern with overemphasizing the contributions of things. She suggests that “We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism - the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature - to counter the narcissm of humans in charge of the world.”\(^\text{25}\) This is a helpful addendum. Humans have been anthropocentric for many thousands of years, and while it is an issue, that does not mean that nonhumans cannot be attributed some level of

\(^{24}\) Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.
\(^{25}\) Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.
human agency. I strive in this dissertation to avoid over-anthropomorphizing the things I encountered, and instead describe things as they are within the rather restrictive limits of human language. This does not solve the problem, but it does at least avoid assuming that we humans have the ability to understand the agency of things. Bennett’s notion of vitality enables a discussion of the plants and animals that are deeply intertwined in food systems. In her chapter “Edible Matter,” Bennett explains that she treats food as “cognitive bodies vying alongside and within an other complex body (a person’s ‘own’ body).” She attributes cognitive agency to food because of its scientifically demonstrated ability to alter human cells, bodies, and emotions. Bennett analyzes the writings of Nietzsche and Thoreau to describe the material agency attributed to food in the nineteenth century. She accepts the food categories that Nietzsche and Thoreau set up and sustains their notions of what she calls “vegetal vitality.” By this, she means that some foods, like vegetables, are vital. Others are not.

We would say that the berries in Pop-Tarts do not act the way their wild counterparts do, or that processed cheese and sterile-filtered wine are rendered more passive, less vital, and more predictable than their unpasteurized and unfiltered counterparts.

This dissertation deals almost entirely with vital foods. More to the point, it deals most often with food before it is food. So I do not need to jump through theoretical hoops to prove the vitality of matter in this dissertation.

26 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 39.
27 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 43.
28 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 47.
1.3.3 Food and Flows

As I mentioned above, food, like many materials, is ephemeral and dynamic. It moves through many different forms both before it becomes food and after its time as food ends. How does agency shift and change on the trajectory of seed to plant to cucumber to pickle-in-process to pickle to lunch to vitamins and nutrients absorbed by the body to digested matter to waste to compost to fertilizer and back again to planted seeds? How do human interactions change along with the cucumber/pickle? Religion also gets entangled in this system. Once the cucumber is washed and brought into the kitchen, it is subjected to the laws of kashrut and adherence to those laws will determine the cucumber/pickle’s fate. If someone dropped a ham into the pickling barrel, the cucumber will never become a pickle or go through a human body. It will instead skip directly to compost. This cucumber/pickle example illustrates what Hodder calls the “flow of materials.” He proposes that “things are really just stages in the process of the transformation of matter.”29 As matter transforms, we engage it in different ways. Hodder suggests that we often take things for granted because “we do not recognize that they are not inert.”30 It is easy to ignore a cucumber when it is growing on the vine. Humans may weed around the vine to make sure it is not obstructed, water the vine, and ensure that it is receiving sunlight, but the cucumbers as things are ignored. Until

30 Hodder, Entangled, 6.
the day when they can’t be ignored. There is a brief period of time when cucumbers can be harvested so that they are the right size for pickle jars. One afternoon at Adamah, we were harvesting cucumbers and encountered a number that had been missed a few days prior. They were now too large for pickling, and would instead be sent to the kitchen to use in salads. Hodder explains that “we forget they [things] have temporalities different from ours, until those temporalities intrude on us, causing us to take action.”

The cucumbers intruded on our human plans that day. They grew too much while we were ignoring their material presence and Adamah lost money as a result, because pickles are worth more than cucumbers. Examples like this from all my field sites speak to the nature of the human/nonhuman relationships that foodways require. To deal with the changing states of matter and things, I ensure that each description of food or food-in-process is offered with context and the condition of the food or food-in-process at any point in this dissertation should be understood as temporary. In addition, I contend here that religion is similarly contextually dependent.

1.4 Contributing to the Field

In 1969, on a quest for the best beef, V. Mac Baldwin purchased two certified Charolais cows and started grazing them on his wife Peggy’s family farm. In 1981, the Baldwins move to a 331-acre farm in Yanceyville, North Carolina. V. Mac considers himself a grass farmer. In the spring he plants Red River and Quick and Big Crabgrass.

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31 Hodder, Entangled, 6.
In the fall he plants Rye and Marshall Rye grass and Crimson Clover. An on-site chicken breeding operation supplies organic plant food for the grass. His grass farm now stretches for eleven hundred acres. The grass is used to grow and finish hundreds of Charolais cows each year. The grazing system that V. Mac set up was inspired by his Christian beliefs and his dedication to animal husbandry. When his cows are ready, V. Mac sends them to Chaudhry Halal Meats for processing. V. Mac chose Chaudhry because they slaughter and process his cows with minimal stress to the animals. The labels on the packaged meat distributed to Whole Foods stores throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia reflect the interreligious cooperation that forms the foundation of this enterprise. The meat is Grass-fed, Antibiotic Free, Hormone Free, Extra Lean, and USDA-inspected, Halal Processed.

1.4.1 Free-Range Religion

In this dissertation, the cows are not the only thing that has gone free-range. As examples from my fieldwork and research will show, the religions entangled in food reform have moved out into extra-institutional spaces. So, this dissertation is about free-range religion. This label is convenient, because I study food, but it also serves as an accurate descriptor of religious food reformers. I use free-range in every intended sense of the word. As animals are free to move about in spaces and mingle with various plants and animals, so too are religious people in the United States. My research considers practices that were created when religious worlds collided with each other and with
non-religious culture and science. The religious practices that emerge are not clearly identifiable as “Christian,” “Jewish” or “Muslim.” So my field sites are multi-religious in that they appear to be sites where different religions are practiced, but each site is itself also multi-religious. This is not unique to food practices. My work pushes on the discrete nature of American religions. A study of the lived religion of Americans reveals more blur than boundaries. Both Christians and Muslims are intertwined in the production of Baldwin Beef and the resulting product says more about their dedication to selling the best possible beef than working intra-religiously. Practices at other sites are even less clear. The farm at Pearlstone was staffed this summer by a director who practices meditation at a Shambhala Buddhist center and a Christian volunteer. They worked alongside Jewish staff to implement shmita on the farm. At the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat the owners, who identify as Messianic Jews, teach people how to follow the diet. Going even deeper, many of the practices these religious people are creating and revitalizing stand in opposition to those more frequently practiced by their coreligionists. According to Jewish law, shmita should only be implemented in the land of Israel. For most Christians, focusing excessive energy on the earthly body is theologically inconsistent with the prescribed focus on the status of the soul. So is the farm Jewish? Is the diet Christian? In this dissertation, I argue that these clear-cut categories may work well in some areas of religious studies, but they do not apply everywhere and are especially problematic in the study of lived religion. I am not
interested in whether the religious expressions discussed here are “authentic” or “authorized.” My work starts with the base assumption that if people say they are part of a religious group, then they are. And the fact that religious people do not fit neatly in our prescribed categories is not a reason to ignore or discount their religious practices. Instead, it is an invitation to research religion without preconceived notions of what religion is and isn’t. The religious people of America do not exist in neatly bounded silos, so I went free-range with them. What I found is that religion is not black and white; it comes in many shades of gray (or, as I will describe below, green). Along these lines, this dissertation contributes to three main areas of religious studies: American Religion, Green Religion, and Religion and Food.

1.4.2 American Religion

In Between Heaven and Earth, Robert Orsi suggests that “Departments of religious studies are really thus departments of the study of desirable religions.”32 In religious studies departments we tend to divide ourselves into fields drawn from a short list of religious traditions. Fields like “Religion and Modernity,” “Religion and Culture” and “American Religion/Religion in the Americas” seek to remedy these problems and allow for some flexibility in the study of religious traditions. However, religious studies is still set up with the assumption that scholars study one religion, or perhaps study religion comparatively. There is less room for people to study religion in a more holistic way and

32 Orsi, Between Heaven and Earth, 190.
there are few opportunities to study religions that are less “desirable.” Part of my project includes adherence to a broad definition of religion. I subscribe to Orsi’s definition of religion as a network of relationships between heaven and earth, with some caveats.33 First, “heaven” needs to be amended to include non-Christian conceptions of the spiritual world. And Heaven wasn’t only problem for many of my interlocutors. A fair number of the people working within and even leading these religious food reform groups do not believe in a personal god. Instead, they talk about spirituality or the power of nature. Many of these people would end up in the sociological category “spiritual but not religious” except that they maintain a connection to a religion despite their rejection of theism. This is an important and understudied area of American religion - the spiritual and semi-religious. They are seekers and they are looking both within and outside their religions to maintain its relevance in their lives. Second, I take “earth” very seriously and include relationships between humans and nonhumans on earth. Finally, and on a related note, I prefer the “mesh” language of Tim Ingold and Timothy Morton to the “network” language of Bruno Latour. The mesh is all encompassing. It considers humans, plants, animals, microorganisms, and elements like water, carbon and nitrogen. It alleviates the need for nodes that focus attention on particular actors and instead encourages attention to a multitude of beings acting together, separately, and in opposition all at once. Religion emerges from the mesh of

33 Orsi, Between Heaven and Earth, 2.
human and nonhuman things and describes the relationships between humans, nonhumans, and the spiritual world. Religion can be found in the embodied practices that humans use to improve these relationships. This attention to the interactions between humans and nonhumans contributes an attention to ecology to the field of American religion, but it also provides new material for the study of green religion.

1.4.3 Green Religion

Catherine Albanese described “nature religion” in her book *Nature Religion in America* as a cluster of beliefs, behaviors, and values centered on the way that people orient themselves in the world.\(^34\) Albanese addressed the nineteenth century health reform movement as a “behavioral expressions of the religion of nature.”\(^35\) She described Sylvester Graham’s diet reforms as an attempt to reverse the failures of humans to attend to the needs to their bodies. Evan Berry highlighted the subsequent expansion of nature religion in his essay, “Nature Religion and the Problem of Authenticity.” He listed five ways that contemporary scholars conceptualize of nature religion including people who use “religious” terminology to describe and shape experiences with the natural world, a social phenomena structured around rituals related to the natural world, a cultural phenomenon where people are “religious” about their environmentalism, environmentalist movements within “conventional” religious


traditions, and religions that draw on nature as a symbolic resource. The religious groups I study move among and between these conceptualizations of nature religion. Many of them used religious language to describe the natural world - they experienced awe watching the morning mist rise from the lake and they saw miracles when vegetables sprouted up in the fields. I participated in an impromptu ritual to celebrate the full moon and regimented juice breaks that forced us to stop for fifteen minutes twice a day to rejuvenate our bodies and minds. My interlocutors included religious environmentalists and people who were religious about their environmentalism. Because of the variations in variety of experiences I encountered, I find the term “green religion” more broadly applicable to my field sites. Bron Taylor distinguishes between two different shades of green religion in his book *Dark Green Religion*.

It is important to distinguish between green religion (which posits that environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation) and dark green religion (in which nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care).

This brings us down to two categories from the five Berry lays out in relation to nature religion. Neither category suffices as a description of everyone I encountered, but it is useful to conceptualize my field sites within the spectrum of green religion. The requirements for inclusion as “green religion” describe everyone I encountered. Their ideas about what “environmentally friendly behavior” involves differed, but they all

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expressed concerns about the environmental crisis and/or the need to be more attentive to the plants and animals that share our planet. At the two Jewish farms in particular, the religion took on a darker green hue. Here nature was imbued with value and sacrality that requires humans to treat it with care. Land deserves a Sabbath, and humans break theirs to milk goats so they won’t experience unnecessary pain. Taylor also describes dark green religion as “generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings.” At Pearlstone, the efforts to restore the riparian zone are not meant to improve their agricultural enterprise. Instead, they are meant to revive the indigenous ecology of their land. Dedication to ecology has moved religious people out of the cities and into environments where they recenter their lives and religions in order to engage with and care for nature.

1.4.4 Religion and Food

There is a growing body of scholarship on religion and food. This attention to food has opened up a vital area of study given the centrality of food in the lives of religious people (and all people). However, this scholarship has a heavy bias towards the consumption of food and the theologies and identities that are wrapped up in the act of eating. There are two major works on religion and food in the United States.

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38 Taylor, Dark Green Religion, 13.
The first is *Born Again Bodies* by R. Marie Griffith. Griffith uses examples drawn mainly from the Christian diet and fitness industry to illuminate the role of religion in shaping American body politics. Her work was foundational in the study of bodies and food in American religion, but food engages bodies long before it is consumed by them. The second is an edited volume, *Religion, Food, & Eating in North America*, edited by Benjamin E. Zeller, Marie W. Dallam, Reid L. Neilson, and Nora L. Rubel. This book brings together fifteen essays in four thematic sections: theological foodways, identity foodways, negotiated foodways, and activist foodways. The vast majority of the essays in this volume center around preparing, eating, and abstaining from food. Only one contribution, “Koinonia Partners: A Demonstration Plot for Food, Fellowship, and Sustainability” by Todd LeVasseur addresses growing food. Beyond the absence of food-in-process, there is also a dearth of actual engagements with food. The volume is entirely anthropocentric in its stubborn adherence to the theologies, religious traditions, and activisms that inform food choices and the identities that the resulting foodways build.

This bias towards consumption likely exists because scholars, like most Americans, are so removed from food production that food is seen simply as something that is eaten. It is often treated as a theological symbol instead of as a material reality.

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that acts and is acted upon by humans. This attention to food as reflection of ideology is problematic because it does not allow for the varied theologies of religious people. Eating kosher food may be theologically significant. However, it may also be a compromise with traditional parents who want to be able to come over for dinner. Or, it could be that after many years of separating milk and meat, cheeseburgers are simply unappetizing. This focus on food in its final stage also leaves out the majority of the interactions that humans have with food as it moves through the food system. It has to be grown, harvested, processed, and prepared. This is where my project seeks to contribute to the study of religion and food. Eating is a feature of every chapter in this dissertation, but the overall focus is on food production and preparation. Religion is certainly enacted at meals, but at my field sites it also plays a key role in decisions made long before food becomes a meal. A second area where my project can contribute to this conversation is in my attention to the food itself. As mentioned previously, I attend here to the matter that eventually gets designated as "food." I will describe how foods look, smell, feel, sound, and taste. This is a project about religious people and food and the points at which they intersect.

1.4.5 Beyond Religious Studies

My work also fits into a broader conversation in the academy and beyond about the evolving proximal relationship between humans, plants, and animals. I research religious people who believe that humanity sits at the precipice of a global
environmental crisis and that it is their duty as religious people to respond by growing plants, raising animals, choosing specific foods to eat, and implementing sustainable agricultural practices. They do so with the urgency of people who believe that their religion requires them to act as stewards for the earth and all the flora and fauna who reside upon it.

1.5 Organization

The chapters in the dissertation are ordered to mirror the movement of food through the food production system from farm to table. So we begin on a vegetable farm, transition to a raw vegan diet center, move higher up the food chain to a cattle ranch, rest along with the land as we might after a hearty meal, and end in the compost pile where ideas are recycled and renewed. Each chapter is described in brief below.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Adamah Environmental Fellowship at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT. I argue that Adamah is a response to three questions at the forefront of American Jewish minds: (1) How should Jews respond to the environmental crisis? (2) What should ecologically minded Jews eat? And (3) How can ecology be combined with spirituality? The answers to these questions offer a glimpse into a food-centered Judaism that endeavors to improve the relationships between humans, plants, animals, and the planet that houses them all.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the Hallelujah Diet as prescriptive literature and as it is put into practice at the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center in Lake Lure, NC. The Hallelujah
Diet fits within a well-documented tradition of Christian diet reform in the United States and the chapter includes an overview of this history and the scholarly treatments of it. My discussion of the Hallelujah Diet centers on the interplay between “new age” ideologies, scientific knowledge, and biblical sources that together form the authoritative foundation of the diet.

Chapter 4 follows cows as they move from grassy hills to the meat counter at Whole Foods. I discuss the relationship between Christianity and Capitalism at Baldwin Family Farms in Yanceyville, NC. It is expensive to raise and finish cattle on grass, and I will describe the role of the on-site hen breeding operation that helps support the cattle ranch. In addition, I will attend to the role that Islam plays in the processing of this USDA halal certified beef. Baldwin beef is produced by religious people start to finish, and this chapter will conclude with thoughts on why that is not mentioned on the marketing materials that accompany the final products.

In Chapter 5, I consider the shmita year, a radical sabbatical practice that was reimagined and implemented at Pearlstone Center in Baltimore, MD during 2014-2015. I will describe the agricultural shmita practices introduced at Pearlstone and the human-centered initiatives that accompanied the agricultural aspects. Pearlstone’s location slightly outside the center of the Baltimore Jewish community gives them the freedom to be a space for innovative Judaism, and shmita exemplifies this. This chapter ends with thoughts on the future potential of shmita in the United States.
Compost is the heart of healthy soil. In compost, leftovers and food waste are repurposed and allow the cycle to begin again. Foodways are at the heart of American religious practice and religious foodways follow a similar model of disposal and eventual return. Religious people are striving towards reform of all aspects of the American food industry and they are returning to their texts and traditions and revitalizing ancient practices and ideas to accomplish their goals. Chapter 6 will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of where religious food reform has been, where it is now, and a glimpse of what the future holds.

1.6 American Manna

According to Exodus, the ancient Israelites were wandering in the desert after they were freed from Egypt. They couldn’t find food, so God provided them with manna from Heaven. The manna would appear each morning, like dew on the grass, and it sustained the Israelites for forty years until they were allowed into Canaan, the land of milk and honey. I chose “American Manna” as the title of this dissertation because many religious people in the United States consider their current situation similar to that of the ancient Israelites. They are free but they cannot find food they consider edible. The produce is covered in pesticides, the water contains additives and toxins, processed foods contain carcinogens outlawed in other countries, the environment is being abused by monoculture farming and fertilizers, and millions of animals live (briefly) on factory farms. For these reasons and others religious people are
refusing to eat many of the foods that populate the shelves at their local supermarkets.

Faced with food they are not willing to eat, they look inward to their religions and
outward to God to provide an alternative. Four such alternatives are discussed here.

And, like manna, these alternatives appear mysteriously in the wilderness. In this
dissertation, I strive to record their presence, their collaborations, and their innovations.

For if they are successful, after years of working towards reform they may be
supplanted by a new food system. Perhaps even a system of milk and honey.
2. Soil: Ecology, Food, and Judaism at the Adamah Farm Fellowship

“And God saw that it was good.”

(Genesis 1 JPS)

2.1 Introduction

July 4, 2015 fell on a Saturday. At Adamah, the Jewish Environmental Fellowship at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, the fellows have Saturdays off for Shabbat. Instead of spending the day working on the farm and attending classes, the fellows spend Saturdays taking leisurely walks and trips into town. As the sun started to set, I joined two of the fellows, Shana and Debby¹ on a hike up to Lookout Point, an overlook that sits on the Appalachian Trail adjacent to the retreat center. Shana and Debby were very patient with me (and my recently reconstructed knee) as we trudged up the steep trail. I arrived at the top exhausted but the view that greeted me was worth the climb.

¹ All the names of the Adamah Fellows have been changed to protect their privacy. However, I did not change the names of the Adamah and Isabella Freedman staff and apprentices because their names and photographs appear on the Hazon website and are freely accessible to the public.
We had just settled in when Anna, an Isabella Freedman employee, joined us. The sun was setting, so we decided to start the Havdalah ceremony, which ends Shabbat. This ceremony delineates the separation between Shabbat and the rest of the week. Four blessings are recited: one over wine, one over spices, one over the candle lighting, and a blessing when the candle is extinguished. We brought a candle with us, but we had to get creative to come up with the other Havdalah supplies. Anna’s scented oils took the place of a spice box and we used water instead of wine. As the first fireworks started to dot the horizon below us, we sang the blessings together. After we finished, more fellows, staff, and visitors from Isabella Freedman joined us. When Rabbi Jeffrey Greenberg, Isabella Freedman’s Director of Finance and Administration, made it to the top, he also wanted to do Havdalah. We took out the candle and the oils once more. This time we used beer that a few of the other fellows had brought up with them and performed the ceremony a second time. After we finished the blessings, we continued

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The text of this blessing relates to the distinction between the sacred (Shabbat) and the profane (the rest of the week).
singing. Instead of the usual cacophony of fireworks, our ears were treated to a choir of about twenty voices singing in harmony as we watched the colorful displays below us. We hiked down the mountain by the light of our headlamp and spent the rest of the evening enjoying kosher burgers around a campfire. This July 4 celebration epitomizes my experience at Adamah. It was a blended celebration - we hiked up a mountain, performed an improvised version of an ancient Jewish ceremony (twice), and enjoyed the standard July 4th fireworks. July 4th on the mountain was made possible by Isabella Freedman’s position as creative and pluralistic Jewish community.


Magid argues that Judaism is postethnic; “Jewishness” is no longer the sole ethnic identity of American Jews. American Jews, Magid suggests, have become a multi-ethnic/multi-racial people and Jewishness is balanced alongside other identities. He identifies two basic periods in what he sees as the American Jewish “disassimilation” - or the period post-assimilation. He terms the first period romantic/nostalgic and the second period the constructive/illustrative. Magid suggests that the romantic/nostalgic period lasted from the 1960s to the late 1990s.

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3 Participant Observation, Adamah Farm, July 4, 2015.
by the Havurah movement and Chabad, this period was defined by a “reengagement with tradition in a world in retreat from secularism.”6 The constructive/illustrative period is our current period. Magid explains that in this period, there is “a selective adaptation of a tradition” that is distinct from traditional or Orthodox Judaism and is instead aligned with “New Age spiritual and politically progressive principles.”7 Magid clarifies that these Judaisms use traditions from the past but do not “hold them to be anything more than creative resources with which to reconstruct a new Jewish spirituality.”8 Magid notes that in some circles, this type of Judaism is referred to as “post-halakha,” or post-Jewish law, because “it reimagines Judaism from its very roots without the obligatory tie to halakha or its past authority.”9 This creative Jewish spirituality is embraced at Adamah. And, pertinent to the purpose of this project, so are non-Jewish spiritualities. Magid acknowledges this tendency in his account of postethnic Judaism: “It is open to the conscious use of religious syncretism and the sharing of texts and rituals with other religions.”10 He identifies the Jewish Renewal Movement as one response to maintaining Jewishness and Judaism in the postethnic period.11 This is an important connection because many the Judaisms at Adamah are heavily influenced by the Renewal movement. Adamah prioritizes specific environmental issues instead of

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6 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 7.
7 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 7.
8 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 8.
9 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 8.
10 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 8.
11 Magid, American Post-Judaism, 9-10.
adhering to the broad-based approach of Renewal Judaism, which combined with their dedication to pluralism separates them from the Renewal Movement. Magid, who considers Renewal to be “the first systematic attempt to reconstruct Judaism in a post-Judaism era,” also states that he does not believe Renewal can solve this problem alone.\textsuperscript{12} The reason for this, he writes, is that “the questions themselves are in a state of flux.”\textsuperscript{13} This is the key point that I will take up in this chapter. Adamah is addressing issues that were raised by leaders of the Renewal movement and raising new questions about Jewish identity in the twenty-first century.

I argue that Adamah is a practical strategy created and enacted by Jews seeking answers to questions about their relationship with the environment, the food that they eat, and their Jewishness. I identified three main focal questions within the framework of Adamah that they appear to be addressing: (1) How should Jews respond to the environmental crisis? (2) What should ecologically minded Jews eat? and (3) How can ecology be combined with spirituality? The Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center Leadership hired Shamu Sadeh to start a farm in 2004. Shamu, who has directed Adamah since 2004, established the fellowship program. The program is set up to educate the fellows about the multiple aspects of the environmental crisis and give them practical solutions to address the crisis in their lives after they leave Adamah. As the

\textsuperscript{12} Magid, \textit{American Post-Judaism}, 4.
\textsuperscript{13} Magid, \textit{American Post-Judaism}, 4.
fellows learn more about their place as humans in the ecology of the earth, they are faced with questions about what they should eat. They are guided through community discussions about how to set up the kitchen in their shared house and spend time working in the kitchen at the retreat center on site. Adamah’s dedication to pluralistic Judaism encourages the fellows to consider what it means to be Jewish and asks them to work towards combining their environmentalism with their Judaism. The Adamah staff, apprentices, and fellows ponder what it means to be Jewish in the twenty-first century by creating spaces for contemplation around what they eat, where it comes from, and how the land that produced it was treated. Their mission statement evidences this: “The Adamah Fellowship cultivates the soil and the soul to produce food, to build and transform identities, and to gather a community of people changing the world.” At Adamah, identity is not the first question addressed in their mission. First and foremost, Adamah is a program that seeks to connect young Jews to the earth to “produce food.” This is clarified in the second sentence of the mission: “That means we grow vegetables, fruit, herbs, goats, flowers, eggs, and more using organic and sustainable methods and grow people by creating hands-on experiences with ecology, food systems, spiritual practice, a vibrant evolving Judaism, and intentional community.” The flattening of any kind of species hierarchy in this sentence is striking because people are not often

15 “Adamah.”
16 “Adamah.”
described as growing in the same way that plants and animals grow. At Adamah they
grow vegetables, goats, eggs, and people. This ecological approach is central to every
piece of the Adamah program. In this chapter I will discuss the three major components
of the Adamah program. To start, a brief history of Jewish environmentalism will place
the ecological sensibility of Adamah in context. This program is primarily about food.
For this reason, the second section is dedicated to the foodways at Adamah. In this
section, the labor model of Adamah as it is deployed to “grow people” and “transform
identities” will be considered as an integral component of Adamah foodways. The last
section focuses on the “vibrant evolving Judaism” of Adamah. This chapter offers a
glimpse into a food-centered Judaism that endeavors to improve the relationships
between humans, animals, plants, and the planet that houses them all.

2.2 Cultivating Soil and Souls

2.2.1 Interdependence, Agriculture, and Environmentalism

The Tuesday after Independence Day, the fellows, also known as Adamahniks,
met on top of Beebe Hill for Avodat Lev, the service of the heart that takes place at six
am each weekday morning. That morning, Shamu asked us to participate in an
“Interdependence Day” celebration. Standing between the Kaplan Family Farm where
we spent most of our work sessions and Beebe Hill, which sits just beyond Isabella
Freedman’s property line, he asked us to look at the world around us and really pay
attention to it. He wanted us to consider the plants, the animals, the sounds, and the
sights that the fellows often miss as they bustle about their work around the farm. After Shamu finished giving us instructions, he led us on a mostly silent hike through the forest. We stopped a few times to admire trees, fungi, and the sound of the birds. After walking for about ten minutes, we reached a grass meadow overlooking the valley. Shamu started the first verse of “Ashrei”\textsuperscript{17} - a question and answer song based on Psalm 84, which translates to “Happy are those who dwell in Your house, may they always praise You Selah!”\textsuperscript{18} Different people spontaneously sang out the call portion of this call and response song each time. We walked through tall grass to the other side of the hill and Shamu led the Shema, the central prayer in the morning Shacharit service. He gave us time to reflect silently on where we were and what we were seeing for the Amidah portion of the service. I am not sure how long we sat in the dewy grass but eventually Shamu brought us back together to sing one more song, “Oseh Shalom,” a song about peace, before we headed back down. We stopped a few times on the way down to admire some interesting mushrooms and then dispersed to do morning chores.\textsuperscript{19}

Shamu’s “Interdependence Day” celebration encouraged us to see ourselves as part of the local ecology. A few of the fellows remarked later that they hadn’t fully realized until that morning that the retreat center sits in a valley. A walk through the forest alerted us to the flora native to Northwest Connecticut and helped us see that the

\textsuperscript{17} אשלי הללוך ישלו יושבי אשרי
\textsuperscript{18} “Avodat Lev: Service of the Heart,” Adamah Reader, 22.
\textsuperscript{19} Participant Observation, Avodat Lev, Beebe Hill, July 7, 2015.
species considered invasive on the farm were an integral piece of the local ecology beyond its borders. When Shamu and I sat down the next day for an interview, he expanded on this idea of “interdependence.” He told me that a holistic approach to spirituality, food, and farming can help reshape our understanding of ourselves, our tradition, our spiritual life, and our ecological life.20 The verse that adorns the gates to the Kaplan Family Farm on Beebe Hill where most of the vegetables and fruits are grown reads, “And God saw that it was good.” This phrase, repeated throughout the creation account in Genesis I, shapes Shamu’s ecological approach. God created everything and then decided creation was good. Humans, Shamu insisted, should stop trying to master nature, and instead learn to work with it. He brought this up during a compost class during the week, encouraging us to compost at home without purchasing compost starter kits. Everything humans need to grow food and process the waste is already there, and it is good.21 The Avodat Lev walk combined the morning Jewish prayer ritual with a walk intended to raise our ecological awareness.

Many of the classes I sat in on at Adamah stressed Judaism’s ecological roots. There is a strong agricultural history in Judaism and this is a history that Adamah draws on frequently in classes, farm tours, and food demonstrations. Curiously, Adamah tends to turn back to Biblical and Ancient Israel or to the modern State of Israel for inspiration

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20 Shamu Sadeh, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Main Hall, July 8, 2015.
21 Shamu Sadeh, Compost Class, Adamah Kaplan Family Farm, July 8, 2015.
and agricultural guidance and all but ignore the history of Jewish farming in the United States. In the late nineteenth century, as Jews were emigrating en masse from Eastern Europe, organizations like Am Olam worked to educate Jews in practical tasks and set up communities were groups of Jews could live off the land together. The communes they established in Palestine were the earliest iterations of the kibbutz movement that hold a hallowed place in Israel’s history persist in the contemporary period. The communes that they set up in the wilderness of Louisiana, Oregon, Michigan, North and South Dakota, Colorado, and New Jersey were abandoned within a few years in most cases.\textsuperscript{22} Uri Herscher, author of \textit{Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880-1910}, identifies numerous factors for the failure of this American Jewish agricultural enterprise but he argues that the major problem was that the communitarianism of this effort ran counter to the spirit of American individualism.\textsuperscript{23} He posits that if they had settled individual Jews as farmers in the nineteenth century, they may have succeeded. The failure of the early communities is reason enough for Adamah, and American Jewish history in general, to ignore the nineteenth century Jewish agricultural communes, but the fact that Adamah and other modern farms have also chosen to organize themselves as community farms requires an attention to this history. There is no obvious direct link between the nineteenth and twenty-first century farms, but their


\textsuperscript{23} Herscher, \textit{Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880-1910}, 109-111.
shared mission connects them and illuminates a visible pattern in Jewish tradition. What we see in the two American iterations of Jewish community farming is a desire to connect with Jews of the Biblical and Ancient periods by recreating their agrarian worlds. Perhaps more important for this project, these two movements share a desire to connect Jews to the land and give them practical skills that will allow them to self-sustain in a world where uncertainty reigns and the next meal may or may not be edible, affordable, or available. Whether the threat is Czarist Russia or industrial food, Jews seem inclined to respond by turning back to the past to acquire practical agrarian tools that will allow them to survive into the future.

There is an important distinction between Adamah’s attention to a Jewish agricultural past and Jewish environmentalism. Scholars contend that Jewish environmentalism is relatively new. This is true, but only in the sense that environmentalism, understood as a response to the environmental crisis, is new. The editor of *Judaism and Ecology*, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, asserts that the “Jewish voice has joined the environmental movement relatively recently.”24 She continues, “Jews are not among the leaders of the environmental movement, and environmental activists who are Jews by birth have not developed their stance on the basis of Judaism.”25 Tirosh-Samuelson identifies the early 1970s as the beginning of “the creative weaving of

Judaism and ecology” and she noted that “[s]ince then, Jews from all branches of
modern Judaism... have contributed to Jewish ecology thinking.”

In his chapter in the same volume, Mark Jacobs, founding Executive Director of the Coalition on the
Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), identifies four stages of Contemporary Jewish
Environmentalism, beginning in the late 1960s. The first stage, “defense and inquiry”
came as a response to Lynn White Jr.’s assertion that the roots of the ecological crisis are
religious. The second and third stage, “grassroots awakening and foundation building”
and “engaging leadership” brought Jewish environmentalism into the early 1990s.

Jacobs calls the final stage “movement building.” Jacobs continues by clarifying the
purpose of these movements.

It is the goal of the Jewish environmental movement to engage all Jewish institutions and
their members both in becoming environmentally responsible in their own practices and in
using their political and financial power to further the cause of environmental protection.

Jacobs also pointed out that Jewish environmentalist movements have tended to
concentrate their efforts in three areas: “education, community building, and activism.”

Adamah exemplifies this tendency identified by Jacobs. Adamah is focused on both
education and community building and activism both inspired and is inspired by
Adamah. The central activity of Adamah is their three-month fellowship program,

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26 Tirosh-Samuelson, Judaism and Ecology, xxxvii.
28 Mark X. Jacobs, “Jewish Environmentalism: Past Accomplishments and Future Challenges,” in Judaism and
Press, 2002), 450-463.
29 Jacobs, “Jewish Environmentalism,” 463.
which runs three times per year in the spring, summer, and fall. Through classes and practical experience, the fellows learn about growing food using sustainable techniques and take classes to expand their knowledge of Judaism, agriculture, and themselves. These fellowships inherently build communities. Fellows are welcomed into an alumni network after their fellowship ends. Many Adamah alumni have become leaders in the growing Jewish environmental movement. Adamah alumni have started educational programs, businesses, and farms all over the country. In many cases, Adamah alumni have turned towards activism during and after their time as fellows. Alumni are currently working as activists on issues such as climate change, animal welfare, and food insecurity.

Because of its focus on sustainable food and farming, Adamah has become a training ground for Jewish environmentalist leaders. The activities, prayer sessions, and classes at the farm encourage the fellows to consider the connections between Judaism and the environment and it encourages many of them to pursue environmentalism when they leave. One of the fellows, Rayna, explained that she didn’t seek Adamah out for its Jewish components. However, her experience at Adamah helped her see Judaism with new eyes.

I think at this point, there is something about Judaism that you can no longer deny. It’s just the earth and the soil. We’re such nomadic people. I never really gave it much thought, but

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31 The ADVA network is comprised of Adamah alumni and the alumni of TEVA, a Jewish environmental education program.
32 The Farm at Pearlstone, discussed in detail in chapter five, was started by an Adamah alumnus.
so many [sic: much] of what you read about in the Torah is about the land or the food or the weather. There’s so much to do with our environment. I think being here really takes that to heart. You get to sort of learn about your roots, literally.33

Classes and experiences at Adamah utilize the Torah and other Jewish texts to explore ancient Israel as an agricultural society. Adamah fellows are encouraged to imagine an environmental Judaism inspired by its foundational texts. And this environmental Judaism necessarily extends the interests of its adherents beyond the boundaries of the Jewish people and their lands. When I asked Simcha, a fellow from London, what his plans were upon returning home, his answer illustrated this desire:

There’s also a kind of Adamah-y thing starting up in London. But I’m not sure whether I want to help out with that or not, because I want to save all of humanity, not just the Jews. I’m happy living in an environment that doesn’t have like any kind of terminology regarding how you identify as a human.”34

Simcha voiced an opinion that was shared by many of the fellows. They were at Adamah to learn more about food and farming, and then they would bring that knowledge back into the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds they inhabit. They are also encouraged to reconsider what it means to be human.

2.2.2. Humans Bodies at Work

Working on a farm is an effective way to encourage humans to question their oft-assumed place at the center of the universe. I spent one work session sitting underneath large tables in the greenhouse, weeding between the stones that cover the floor.

33 Rayna, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Lounge, June 30, 2015.
34 Simcha, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Lounge, July 1, 2015.
Although I found the task surprisingly pleasant, I was not sure why the floor of the greenhouse needed weeding. When I posed the question to Molly, a field apprentice and our supervisor that afternoon, she explained that the newly planted seedlings need protection from pests and diseases. When weeds are in the same family as the crops they plant, they may attract pests and diseases that would attack the vulnerable seedlings.  

As one of the fellows, Elisa, and I crawled around on the floor pulling weeds, three additional fellows, Rose, Zev, and Amelia, planted seeds with Molly above us. This one mundane task, weeding, protected both the seedlings and the fall harvest.

The daily lives of the Adamah fellows are shaped by their relationships with the plants and animals on site. If seedlings need protection, a human must hand-weed between the stones in the greenhouse. Weeding is a frequent task assigned to the Adamahniks. It is not an activity that the fellows typically performed daily prior to their arrival at Adamah. As a result, it requires some adjustments before they are comfortable weeding daily. Simcha described the adjustment process his body went through in his first couple weeks at Adamah. “I don’t crouch. I’ve never crouched for that long. Now I have to do it so much.” As Marcel Mauss suggests, techniques of the body are socially constructed and one must learn new techniques to be a farmer. Fruits and vegetables are rarely harvested at heights that would allow humans to stand or sit comfortably.

35 Janna Siller, Email correspondence with author, December 23, 2015.
36 Simcha.
Human bodies readjust to spend time down near the ground where root vegetables grow, or climb ladders into the trees where stone fruits ripen. The aches and pains that accompanied the process my own body went through when it had to adjust to spending hours at a time in crouched or kneeling positions were a reminder of how difficult it is for bodies to acquire new techniques. Weeding also keeps bodies busy in a way that allows minds to rest. Rose mentioned to me that she tended to philosophize farming and enjoyed the idea of it more than the actual act of farming. However, she found weeding quite enjoyable, “I do love being in the dirt. I find weeding very cathartic.”

Many of the other fellows echoed this sentiment.

Since Karl Marx first lamented the alienation of labor, reformers of many kinds have sought to reconnect workers to the pleasure of physical labor. At Adamah, many of the fellows were enthusiastic about farming, because they were able to see the literal fruits of their labor. Susannah, the Associate Registrar for Hazon, who had recently participated in the Spring fellowship, compared her work on the farm as a fellow to her current work in an office at Isabella Freedman:

"It feels really nice to work with your hands and to see – to really see the results of your effort. It’s not like doing something at a desk where you send out a bunch of emails and you wait and you may or may not get responses. You don’t even know if anyone read them. You never get any feedback about anything. And if you do, it’s like – it’s not really that helpful or satisfying. But if you have to weed a row of plants, you spend whatever, an

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38 I met Rose prior to our encounter at Adamah. We were both participants at the TEVA Seminar in 2012 but this prior encounter did not influence my work at Adamah.
39 Rose, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Dining Hall Porch, June 29, 2015.
hour, weeding a row of plants, and at the end it looks totally different. It transforms right in front of your eyes.\textsuperscript{41}

During work session at Adamah, the product of your work is obvious. As Susannah said, when you finish weeding, you are rewarded with the sight of a clean row of plants or grass free stones. Beyond the sense of connection to labor and accomplishment with completed tasks, some of the fellows found the physicality of the labor meaningful. Amelia told me that she’d learned she really loves farming and the act of working the land was part of what attracted her to farming.

It’s been amazing. I’ve learned that I really love farming and I’m pretty good at it. I can pick it up really easily, and that I just connect with – it sounds weird, but that I connect with hard labor. I find that I’m most mentally at ease when I’m just completely physically busy. I really love the group. I like basically everything about it.\textsuperscript{42}

Amelia enjoyed the physical labor and was usually the first to volunteer to use the wheel hoe and other tools that required hard labor. The group dynamic she mentioned also played a critical role in the work sessions. The freedom to chat with one another, listen to music, and even sing while working in the fields make the experience of seeding, weeding, washing or hoeing rather pleasant. The fellows also got creative with adding social elements to their work. For example, sessions with Rose always involved answering her “question of the day” that helped the fellows get to know one another. Fellows also worked out their interpersonal issues, vented frustrations, exchanged gossip, and planned their futures while they weeded and harvested.

\textsuperscript{41} Susannah Davidson, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Gazebo, July 8, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{42} Amelia, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Arts & Crafts Porch, July 8, 2015.
2.2.3 Humans and Plants in a Shared System

Humans on the farm order their hours, days, and weeks around the needs of the plants they grow. Fruits and vegetables need to be harvested when they are ripe. There is not much leeway in this system because overripe cucumbers are too big to fit in pickling jars and raspberries left on the vines too long will rot. Rebecca Bloomfield, Associate Director of Adamah, told me that scheduling the work sessions for the Adamahniks takes a surprisingly large amount of time, in part because of the aspects of their schedule that lie outside human control.\(^{43}\) During the weeks I was at Adamah, the raspberries were ripe and needed to be picked every other day. I was assigned this task often and spent a number of the three-hour work sessions with a cardboard box hung around my neck picking ripe red raspberries alongside two to five fellows. Raspberry vines are prickly and the berries are often hidden among the brambles. To get all the berries, one often has to switch between standing up and crouching down. Jac Cohn, who supervised the raspberry picking, has been working on the farm periodically since she completed the Adamah fellowship in 2012. Under Jac’s leadership, we became an expert berry-picking force. She made sure we picked only the reddest raspberries, but also checked to see that we were getting all of the raspberries as we moved along the rows. More than once during the raspberry harvest, we were unable to cover all of the rows during a work session. Instead of leaving the berries, a few of us would be

\(^{43}\) Rebecca Bloomfield, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Mail Hall, July 7, 2015.
assigned to complete the harvest in the next session instead of moving on to a different task. We couldn’t leave ripe raspberries for an extra day or two because they would rot before our return. An extra work session was added on Sunday mornings in early July to accommodate the increased need for harvesting sessions. Meanwhile, at the Cultural Center, the pickle apprentice, Talya, ordered her days so that she could turn the fresh berries into jam. Farmers adhere to the schedules that their crops require.

Harvesting also provides the fellows with an important lesson in the seasonality of produce. In the United States we have grown accustomed to eating produce from all over the country and the world. We have lost track of when raspberries are in season, and don’t remember or never knew what they taste like freshly picked. The Adamah fellows leave the program with a solid sense of the produce seasons in Northwest Connecticut. Many of the fellows talked to me about how their proximity to and participation on the farm changed their relationship with the land. Debby explained that she had spent time “contemplating the connectedness of all things” through songs and meditation and it had affected her.

I used to hear from people who would talk about land in this spiritual way. I was just like, you’re full of shit…But I think through even this short month, my relationship to the land has become more spiritual, where it’s like I will stop and notice and allow myself to feel curious and struck by things and excited about things. Maybe it was always there. I don’t know what it is exactly. It’s something I’m still figuring out.44

44 Debby, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Lounge, July 2, 2015.
Debby’s reflection exemplifies the ecological sensibility operates at Adamah. The fellows spend large portions of their time outside working the land and the rest of their time in classes and prayer sessions dedicated to enhancing their relationship with the land. The location of Isabella Freedman next to a lake and nestled between three mountains lends a sense of enchantment to everyday experiences on site. When I asked Elisa if her relationship with the land had changed during her time at Adamah she said: “just being in a beautiful place like this, I feel like it’s not hard to feel more connected to nature.”

She continued, “that has changed my experience completely, just being outdoors all the time. It really just gives you a greater appreciation for nature.”

There was even something at Isabella Freedman for Zev, a fellow who came to Adamah as a seasoned farmer. He was used to spending time outside and lamented the fact that the sky was hard to see surrounded by the trees on site. For him, it was early morning walks by the lake that provided a new experience. “I love seeing the mist on the lake every morning. That you just don’t see very often, even though I lived by water for a while.”

Anna, who goes by the title “Mayor of the Woods,” and stayed on as part of a work trade program after completing the fellowship in fall 2014, identified the opportunities to experience interconnectedness as a key piece of the Adamah experience:

[H]aving…the food, putting my food waste into the compost, and then hauling the compost to the compost yard, and then putting the compost on the field, and having the

45 Elisa, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Main Hall Lawn, July 9, 2015.
46 Elisa.
47 Zev, Interview with author, Adamah Kaplan Family Farm, July 7, 2015.
chickens eat the compost, and then eating the chickens’ eggs every day. Having all these things so intricately connected all the time just really laid a groundwork for me to find more connection and meaning in my life. That was really big. That was really important.”

Adamah is set up so that fellows experience the interconnectedness of their world with the plants and animals that are entangled in the human food system. When those connections are explicit and combined with the curiosity and openness that Debby possessed, and the basic beauty of the location that Zev and Elisa mentioned, an authentic spiritual relationship with the land develops. As Anna’s experience shows, through Adamah interdependence moves from being a concept that Shamu teaches in early morning prayer sessions to an integral component of a new relationship between the fellows and their environment.

2.3 Producing Food and Changing Foodways

2.3.1 Adamah Foodways

Once a week, some of the fellows are assigned to “homesteading” for an afternoon work session. My first week at Adamah, I joined Shana, Simcha, Rayna, and Zev for a homesteading session. Music from the Adamah soundtrack created by the Fall 2014 cohort played on a laptop and kept our spirits up as we worked.\(^49\) Shana made granola that all the Adamahniks had requested from the homesteaders. Simcha and I washed and chopped vegetables and stored them in Mason jars in the refrigerator for

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\(^48\) Anna, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Dining Hall, July 10, 2015.
\(^49\) The album is titled “Release: Songs for Shmita.” It is available at https://hazon.bandcamp.com/album/release-songs-for-shmita.
use during the week. We washed chard, kale, and beet greens, wrapped them in towels and placed them in the refrigerator. Zev and Rayna made honey lavender cheese using milk from the goats that reside at Isabella Freedman. After finishing the cheese, they juiced carrots, apples, beets, greens, and lemons into a rich purple liquid that they poured into Mason jars for storage. Simcha, who engaged in kirtan (yogic chanting) after the Adamah soundtrack ended, halted his chanting to insist that the fruit and vegetable pulp be used instead of composted. I washed dishes while Simcha and Zev cooked up “fakin loaf” made from pulp, shwarma seasoning, tomato paste, and eggs. Simcha rolled the remaining pulp into balls with peanut butter.

We had a great time homesteading that afternoon, which tends to be a favorite work session for the fellows. It is also an important one, as the food the homesteaders prepares becomes the basis for their meals in the coming days. Adamahniks eat breakfast at their house, the Beit Adamah or BA, every morning. They also eat lunches and dinners at the house during certain retreats and on Shabbat. In order to cook meals in a reasonable amount of time, produce preparation is required. The other products created that afternoon - the juice, granola, cheese, and pulp balls - supplemented meals throughout the week. These foods replaced processed snacks, which were nowhere to be found in the BA kitchen.

A poster hung next to the refrigerator that helps to explain the absence of processed food items.
Figure 2: Adamah Foodways Poster (photo by author)

The main text of the poster, printed on brown butcher paper and glued to red posterboard, read as follows:

We harvest all of our own produce
We collect fresh eggs from our hens
We enjoy milk, yogurt & cheese from our goats
We receive our staples from the main kitchen
We make as much as we can from scratch

That afternoon, we washed and cut produce harvested from the farm. Eggs from the hens were added to the “fakin loaf,” milk from the goats was made into cheese, and oats, honey, and cinnamon provided by the kitchen became granola. The Adamahniks made all of it from scratch. The rest of the text on the poster pointed to the motivation behind this focus on local and homemade foods. In the center of the poster, words

50 Participant Observation and Photo, Beit Adamah, June 30, 2015.
encircled an abstract design. They read, “We are Conscious, We are Grateful.” The fellows grow and harvest the food themselves. They know exactly where it came from and how much work goes into each meal they eat. Simcha couldn’t fathom wasting the pulp from the vegetables they had grown, so he and Zev repurposed it. The words “Locavore” and “Unprocessed” adorn the edges of the outer circle. Locavore is the term used to describe people who eat food produced close to where they live. The Kaplan Family Farm, where most of the Adamah food is currently grown, is located about a thousand feet from the BA.51 Locavores are often concerned about the fuel used to transport food long distances. At Adamah, food is usually transported to the house from the farm by foot or by bicycle. Food that is made from scratch is actually processed because it is not usually eaten in its raw and uncut form. The term “unprocessed” identifies an opposition to industrial processed foods. Two abridged verses from Ecclesiastes complete the poster: “A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven. A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted.”52 These verses bring the foodways of Adamah full circle by connecting their food manifesto back to an ancient biblical text. They plant their food, they harvest their food, they prepare it from scratch, and they eat it in season.

51 I measured this distance using Google Maps. It is an estimate.
52 These verses are cited on the sign as “Kohelet 3:1-2.” Kohelet is the Hebrew title of Ecclesiastes. A slightly different translation of these verses inspired Pete Seeger’s popular song, “Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season).”
The Adamahniks, for the most part, had not eaten this way prior to their arrival. I asked Susannah to explain her experience with food at Adamah as a recent alumna.

I feel more comfortable and more empowered, knowing more about where my food comes from. I can just walk into the field and be like, I’m going to pick this cucumber and just eat it. It was weird at first to think, I can just go into the field and just pick something and just eat it. It doesn’t need to go through this process of being washed and sanitized and prepared to be eaten. Things are meant to just be eaten as they grow. I’m just used to buying things from the supermarket where I know it’s gone through this whole process to get there. Since we’re an organic farm, we don’t need to wash off all the pesticides that don’t exist.53

I spent an evening harvesting vegetables with Susannah and making dinner together. Her confidence working in both the fields and the kitchen was evident. We snacked on snap peas while we weeded in the shmita garden at the entrance to Isabella Freedman and she helped me identify the different kinds of kale we harvested to make a salad. Back at the home she shared in the staff housing section, nicknamed “the suburbs,” I acted as her sous chef while she made mujadarra. Jac joined us as we sat down to eat. When I spoke with her a few days later, she offered her thoughts on how her approach to food had changed since she came to Adamah three years prior:

I do think my food choices have changed. When I live in a city, I love grocery stores. Even if I have any intuitive feeling that there’s something maybe not right about grocery stores, I sort of love the idea of them, even. They’re great. I love going to the grocery store. It’s such a good trip... And while I had a great time yesterday buying all of the non-local... things from far away as possible, it also complemented my entirely picked-right-before-I-ate-it meal of all local vegetables. So I definitely find that I am going to eat a lot more locally.54

53 Susannah Davidson, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Gazebo, July 8, 2015.
54 Jac Cohn.
Adamah had not changed Jac’s affinity for grocery stores, but it had inspired her to eat more local produce. In talking with the Adamahniks and Adamah alumni, it seemed that although the changes were often small, they were meaningful.

Many of the changes that Adamahniks adopt were made possible simply by being at Isabella Freedman. Meredith Cohen, who is the Barnyard Manager, a Field Apprentice, and a Summer 2013 Adamah Alumna, addressed the importance of living on site for her food habits.

I feel like it’s just so much more direct. I had these values that I wanted to follow, and maybe those values haven’t changed drastically, but I’m just – but I think now I’m more serious about it and I’m actually able to do it.\(^{55}\)

For Meredith, it wasn’t that Adamah changed her values, but living there allowed her to enact her values. Debby, who came to Adamah from her home in a Midwestern city, also mentioned the ease of eating well at Isabella Freedman. “We have the dining hall. They cook all of our meals. It’s amazing and it’s like we don’t have to worry about where the food is coming from. I know it’s all sourced ethically. I know it’s healthy.”\(^{56}\)

The Isabella Freedman kitchen used local produce and avoided problematic foods when possible. The kitchen did not serve almonds during my time there. Susannah explained that this was because most almonds are grown in California, which was in the midst of a major drought. During a compost class, Shamu told us that the kitchen also choses meat based on their dedication to ecological eating. They do not use prime cut meats and they

\(^{55}\) Meredith Cohen, Interview with author, Kaplan Family Farm, July 9, 2015.  
\(^{56}\) Debby.
do not use boneless meats. Shamu explained that there is more food value in bone-in meats and that they were trying to change the way we think about eating animals. The staff at Isabella Freedman work to ensure that their meals better represent the whole animal.\textsuperscript{57} The kitchen sourced meat from distributors who were certified kosher and raise their animals “in alignment with our ethical and ecological standards.”\textsuperscript{58} These decisions made Debby and others confident in the ethical nature of the food they were served in the Isabella Freedman dining hall. However, Debby did wonder what would happen when she returned home and had to cook for herself again. She also expressed concerns for the majority of Americans who do not have access to local organic produce at every meal:

I think that’s a major question in food systems work right now, is how can we make this kind of food the norm when financially it’s totally inaccessible to a majority of people? I have yet to hear of a good response to that.\textsuperscript{59}

This speaks to the mission of Adamah. The program isn’t just about raising consciousness among the fellows who participate in the program. It also encourages them to bring what they see and what they learn into the world. Debby told me that she volunteers with many food justice organizations in and around her city. She may not have a solution to the problem yet, but she is driven to find one and chose Adamah with these aims in mind.

\textsuperscript{57} Shamu Sadeh, Compost Class, Adamah Kaplan Family Farm, July 8, 2015.
\textsuperscript{58} “Kitchen and Dining Policies and Procedures,” Adamah Reader, 14.
\textsuperscript{59} Debby.
2.3.2 Meat: To Eat?

Questions about eating meat loomed large among the fellows during my time at Adamah. They had attended a kosher slaughter, or shechita, demonstration just prior to my arrival.60 This is a component of every Adamah program. Shamu explained that the goal of the shechting experiences was to have the fellows confront slaughter “in a very direct way.”61 They taught classes on tza’ar ba’alei chayim (suffering of living creatures), Jewish approaches to eating or not eating meat, and ecological approaches to eating meat and whether eating meat is sustainable. Then the fellows attended the demonstration. They shecht chickens in the spring and summer and male goats in the fall.62 The demonstration came up frequently throughout the week as the Adamahniks continued to process their experience observing the kosher slaughter of a chicken.

Rose told me that she had been playing around with veganism for a while and had been a vegetarian for many years. She read the book Dominion by Matthew Scully in preparation for the slaughter demonstration and it had an impact on her. She said it showed her how bad factory farming is and made her reconsider her relationship with

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60 Coincidentally, I also attended a shechita demonstration prior to my arrival at Adamah. Naftali Hanau, an Adamah alumnus, a trained shochet, and founder and owner of Grow and Behold Meats, came to Chapel Hill, NC for a demonstration sponsored by the local Conservative Synagogue.
61 Shamu Sadeh.
62 Shamu Sadeh.
animals. After watching the chicken slaughter, Rose became a vegan. She explained her decision to me.

Eating animal products is a violent act. Some people may say it’s also a necessary act, or a morally correct one. But you can’t say it’s not violent. And I just didn’t want to be participating in yet another violent process in the world.”

Rose’s decision to become a vegan was a direct result of her experience at Adamah and the shechita demonstration. Her preparatory reading provided her with a background on factory farming and compelled her to think about animals, but witnessing chicken slaughter was the major force behind her decision. She saw a person take the life of a chicken, and deemed it too violent an act to warrant her continued participation in eating animal products. Debby echoed Rose’s evaluation of the slaughter as a violent act. She had been to a shechita demonstration before at the Hazon Food Conference at Isabella Freedman. She thought she was prepared, but participating in the slaughter proved to be different than watching it from afar:

[T]his time I was heavily involved in the entire process. With the slaughtering I was like, cool. The processing was super violent and disgusting and the smell – it smelled like chicken, which freaked me out. You’re just pulling the innards from the bird. It’s just such a physical, violent thing. You see 30 underdeveloped eggs in there, and you’re just like – and it took over an hour of just doing this.

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63 Dominion is one of the books in the BA library. When I was there, Rose had finished the book and Simcha was in the middle of reading it.
64 Rose.
65 Rose.
66 Debby.
Debby was left wondering whether eating meat was right. She had been a vegetarian for six years at one point, and then started eating meat again when she found a way to avoid industrial meat. Debby was left with a lot of questions, and no clear decision on how to proceed.67

The slaughter demonstration proved a compelling event that other witnesses had to come to terms with as well. Rayna mentioned a similar reaction to the slaughter demonstration. She was still processing the event because, in her words, “[i]t was wild.”68 She told me that she used to only eat meat out, because she doesn’t like handling raw meat. She remembered that her father had always only eaten and served them kosher meat at home. She said he would tell her that he believed there should be a human present at the slaughter for ethical reasons and to ensure a humane slaughter.

After the slaughter, Rayna found herself “now there with him.”69 In a reversal of her old approach to only eating meat out, Rayna thought she’d probably only eat meat at home in the future. She added the caveat that she would have to be sure what the animal’s habitat was, what its life was like, its relationship with the farmer, and the conditions of its slaughter.70 Elisa, whose family had already switched to kosher pasture-raised hormone and antibiotic free meat from Grow and Behold when she and her brothers insisted upon the change, also struggled to figure out the best way forward after the

67 Debby.
68 Rayna.
69 Rayna.
70 Rayna.
slaughter. She found the shechita to be “a really powerful experience” but her gut reaction was that if it was done in an ethical way, there was nothing wrong with slaughter.\textsuperscript{71} However, she still had a lingering sense of discomfort with the idea of killing animals for food. Elisa was hesitant to make what she called “a huge change” because the way she saw it, if she was going to decide that animals were not food, she would have to become a vegan and she wasn’t quite ready to take that leap.\textsuperscript{72}

Diet changes were not unique to the omnivores in the group. Amelia, who arrived as a vegan, enjoyed my question about whether her food habits had changed since she’d come to Adamah because she saw her situation as different than many of her peers. Instead of Adamah changing her diet, she came to Adamah after her diet had changed. She reflected, “I think in some ways my diet brought me here, so that’s kind of an interesting twist.”\textsuperscript{73} But even Amelia experienced a change in how she thinks about food while at Adamah. “But I guess now I’m more conscious…maybe I shouldn’t be buying bananas from Puerto Rico or Costa Rica every week. Maybe I shouldn’t be buying mangoes.”\textsuperscript{74} She told me that she had been thinking of at least trying to limit her consumption of mangoes and bananas because, as a strong believer in self-efficacy, she

\textsuperscript{71} Elisa.
\textsuperscript{72} Elisa.
\textsuperscript{73} Amelia.
\textsuperscript{74} Amelia.
felt it would still make a difference. Amelia had also had some second thoughts about eating eggs since she arrived at Adamah:

I’ve been going back and forth about whether eating eggs, as long as you raised the chickens, is OK. Because I really don’t believe in taking from other living animals. But I just feel like in some ways, they might not have a horrible life here. At least the ones that are roaming around the compost and eating awesome food.

Amelia still felt that it wasn’t right to take things from animals, and she hadn’t changed her diet, but spending time with the chickens had made her think. This increased consciousness about food was shared by all the fellows and alumni.

Like Amelia, I also arrived at Adamah as a vegan, albeit a very new one. And even though I was only at Adamah for two weeks that summer, I too became more conscious of where my food comes from, and changed my approach to some foods. For example, after picking and eating raspberries for two weeks, I was suddenly aware of two things: First, picking raspberries is hard work. Having experienced the minor bodily aches and pains associated with berry picking, I grew increasingly uncomfortable with my knowledge that this work is done in the United States by migrant workers who

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Amelia.
Amelia.
Amelia.
I adopted a vegan diet during my week at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat (see chapter 3), which preceded my weeks at Adamah with only two days in between. I decided to continue my vegan experiment because I knew there would be vegan options at Adamah/Isabella Freedman. By the end of my time there, it was no longer an experiment. I am still a vegan.
endure long hours, low pay, and dismal living conditions. Second, raspberries purchased from Harris Teeter or Whole Foods taste nothing like plump red berries harvested straight from the vine. I have not purchased a berry, rasp or otherwise, since I left Adamah. All of the food systems experiences at Adamah are designed to make the fellows stop and think. They are encouraged to consider their relationship with land, plants, and animals. This may not result in a change in dietary habits, but as these experiences of the Adamah fellows show, increased consciousness is almost inevitable.

2.4 Vibrant Evolving Judaism

2.4.1 Prayer at Adamah

I spent one entire day at Adamah in various stages of wetness. The day started when my alarm was almost drowned out by the sound of thunderstorms at five am. It was pouring as I left my room for Avodat Lev. I only had to walk a few hundred feet to the synagogue, but by the time I got there I was soaked and a few minutes late. I stepped into the synagogue, removed my rainboots, and joined the fellows who were sitting crosslegged in a circle on the floor singing of “Mah Tovu” (“How Good”). Meredith led lev that morning. She talked about her childhood admiration for her rabbi, who wore a large tallit (prayer shawl). She invited us to walk around and try out the different tallit

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79 Seth M. Holmes, Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). Many of the workers also face dangerous border crossings, sexual harassment, and overt racism.

she had laid out in the synagogue and then select one to wear if we felt comfortable doing so. After we had selected our tallitot, we returned to our seats. Some of the fellows wrapped their tallit around their damp bodies as a source of warmth. Others covered their heads and faces. We sang “Modeh Ani” (“I Give Thanks”) and the Shema together. When we finished, Meredith explained that she had also put out different prayerbooks. She wanted us to pick up a book we were not used to so we could experiment with different versions of the Admidah prayer. I picked up a Jewish Renewal prayerbook, and read through the prayer while lying down on my stomach. Some of the fellows sat reading through the prayer while others were lying down enjoying a moment of quiet meditation. We came together for a few songs at the end and headed back out into the rain for morning chores.81

Avodat Lev at Adamah has two components. There is the keva, the fixed structure of the morning shacharit service, and the kavannah, the intention that individuals bring to the service. According to the information page about Avodat Lev in the Adamah binder that all fellows receive upon their arrival, the goal of Avodat Lev is “Learn by using the core structure of Jewish prayer service and liturgy and evolving it.”82 The keva piece helps fellows who are less familiar with Judaism learn about the Jewish prayer service and it includes reciting the Shema and the Amidah prayers. The

81 Participant observation, Isabella Freedman Synagogue, July 1, 2015.
kavannah aspects of morning lev are meant to “create and cultivate a spiritual experience.” When I was at Adamah, the kavannah components included hikes, like the “Interdependence Day” celebration, meditation, body movement, a drum circle, writing exercises, group and partner conversations on various topics, and Meredith’s tallit exercise. Anna and Susannah both attend lev most mornings, even though their tenure as Adamah fellows has ended. The six am prayer service often leaves them with a few awkward hours before they start to work, but they both feel that when they don’t go to Lev, they regret it. And they rarely regret going to Lev. Susannah told me about a class about lev that she and the Springniks took with the newly arrived Summerniks in June.

I remember at that class Shamu did an exercise where he said if you agree with this statement stand on this side of the room, and if you disagree with this statement, stand on that side. He said, “you’ve had a meaningful experience with Jewish prayer,” and all the Springniks went to yes. All the Summerniks were towards no. And he said, “before coming here,” and all the Springniks moved over to join the Summerniks.

Susannah told me that after the exercise, a few of the Summerniks told her that they were really curious to experience Lev after they saw how it had changed the Springniks’ experience with Jewish prayer. By the time I arrived a few weeks later, the Summerniks were fully immersed in Lev and were excited to begin taking turns leading Lev themselves.

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84 Susannah Davidson and Anna Schuman.
85 Susannah Davidson.
86 Susannah Davidson.
Amelia, who told me she’s “not into Judaism” but that she “really likes the cultural kind of Judaism” was surprised to find that she really enjoyed Lev. She recalled experiences from her childhood at a Jewish day school where they had morning prayers every day. They would pick up the siddur (prayerbook) and go through the prayers in order until they finished. Her experience had been markedly different.

Whereas our Lev is really – I think it’s more spiritual. We meditate, we sing the beautiful songs. Even though they are prayers, they’re just beautiful. They make it more of a spiritual experience than just saying it because you’re supposed to be saying it. And we don’t sing the same songs every morning. Sometimes we sing different ones.

Amelia felt that it was the songs helped change the experience of shacharit into a more spiritual experience than the prayer services at her day school. She was not the only one who talked about the songs. The musical aspects of Lev and Adamah came up repeatedly in my conversations and interviews with the Summerniks. Rayna described herself as a “very cultural Jew” who likes to celebrate Shabbat and say the basic prayers. She felt that the more classes she took about the Jewish laws, the less she connected to a rule-based Judaism. However, she was really enjoying the prayers services at Adamah.

I love singing. If there’s something ever a group of people, food, and singing, I’m there. So this place is like that, all the time, which is really cool. It’s really nice to be surrounded by Jews and there’s just an instant knowing of each other. For me, that’s the cool part.

Zev echoed Rayna’s sentiment that singing was a highlight of the Adamah program. He told me that his favorite part of the Jewish aspects of the program had been learning the
songs. He had enjoyed singing in Sunday School, but this was a different type of experience.

But now I’m learning about the actual translation of what I’m singing, really getting into using it as a mantra, a way to bring in peace and tranquility and joy. It’s probably my favorite aspect of the whole thing so far.\footnote{Zev.}

Zev and the other fellows had found that morning Lev was different from their previous Jewish experiences. It was flexible, it was musical, and it was spiritual. Amelia reflected on this larger purpose of Avodat Lev: “it’s more just a holistic idea that the morning prayers are meant to start you. It’s more about you than it is about reading a text for the sake of reading the text.”\footnote{I would echo this sentiment based on my experience at Lev. I am not a morning person and I arrived at Adamah having recently given up caffeine. And yet, I consistently felt refreshed and awake after Lev, no matter how little sleep I had gotten the night before.} Avodat Lev gives the fellows experience with one of the daily Jewish prayer services that helps them connect to Judaism through song and head into their work ready for the day.

\textbf{2.4.2 Halakhah At Adamah}

After Lev, I walked down to the barnyard with Ariel and Miriam. There were four goats that needed milking - Feta, Bagel, Talia, and Zola. They came into the milking hut in pairs. When they were situated in their spots, Miriam and Ariel sprayed their udders with iodine and then pulled a stream of milk for Meredith to check. Meredith checked the milk to make sure it was the proper color and consistency. Once Meredith gave her ok, Miriam and Ariel started milking the goats. I watched for a while, until
Miriam offered to show me how to do it. I found it fairly difficult, having no experience with milking prior to that morning. Noticing that I was slowing down the process, I gave my seat back to Miriam. When Ariel and Miriam thought they had gotten all the milk, Meredith sat down and pulled every last bit of milk out of their udders. The goat milk is tested every week and last week the tests had shown higher than normal somatic levels, so she wanted to be sure their udders were completely empty to avoid infection. When Meredith was certain they had gotten all the milk, the milk was poured into a large stainless steel container and weighed. The goats were treated with udder massages and another iodine dip before they were sent back into the yard. Miriam and Ariel repeated the process with the other two goats, and then headed off to the cultural center to wash the buckets. I helped Meredith move the goats out to the pasture for the day. I mentioned that I had seen a special note about goat milking on Shabbat in the Adamah binder. I asked Meredith what they had decided about milking on Shabbat. According to Jewish law, milking is prohibited on Shabbat. However, at Adamah they considered this prohibition alongside one of their central Jewish values, Tza’ar Ba’alei Chayim (suffering of living creatures). This Talmudic principle forbids humans from inflicting unnecessary pain on animals. The Adamah staff decided to milk to goats on Shabbat because leaving them without milking for twenty-four hours would cause pain. At Adamah, the staff decided that the health of their goats took precedence over the human Shabbat.
prohibitions. However, they do not use the milk that is collected on Shabbat, they give it to a neighbor. Milk collected on Shabbat is not kosher.

The milking example offers a glimpse into how Judaism is worked out in practical situations on the farm. Shabbat tends to be the occasion where most of the halakhic issues are raised at Adamah. The Adamah fellows rotate through assignments associated with Shabbat. Each week, someone is put in charge of cooking dinner and someone else leads the Shabbat worship at the Beit Adamah. The fellows can choose to open their home to the Isabella Freedman community for Shabbat, or they can hold a fellows-only Shabbat. Shabbat is meant to be inclusive and the goal is to create a meaningful experience for all of the fellows. This is a difficult task. The first week I was at Adamah, Rose was in charge of cooking dinner and leading the Kabbalat Shabbat service. She worked hard to ensure that everyone had something to eat. There were two vegan challot made by Elisa and Zev. They took different approaches to baking the two loaves, so one was long and flat and the other was short, puffy, and undercooked in the middle. Both were delicious. After a dinner of zucchini lasagna, pasta, black eyed pea soup, and salad, we moved into the living room for the service. Rose led us through a series of prayers and directed readings. We ended with a community song session that went on for quite a while. We sang Hebrew songs, African-American spirituals, a Rumi

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91 Often non-Jewish milkers will be brought in to milk animals on Shabbat to avoid causing pain and working on Shabbat.
92 Participant observation, Adamah Barnyard, July 1, 2015.
poem set to music, and a song Simcha wrote about the farm.\textsuperscript{93} Elisa reflected on the Shabbat experiences she had at Adamah a few days later. She said she wasn’t sure they had reached a point where they’d found a Shabbat that everyone could appreciate as beautiful. However, she was optimistic that once people got more comfortable with each other and with Judaism, they could get there.\textsuperscript{94}

I spent one Friday morning work session walking the perimeter of the Isabella Freedman campus with Elisa and Baruch, a Mashgiach (Kashrut Supervisor) in the kitchen, to check the Eruv. This line of string connected by posts and trees encloses the Isabella Freedman site and allows staff and retreat guests to carry items outside of their rooms on Shabbat. The Eruv allows Shabbat-observant Jews to visit the retreat center and feel comfortable carrying on Shabbat. Meanwhile, all across the site, staff and fellows turn on lights, make phone calls, and drive. Isabella Freedman and Adamah are pluralistic Jewish communities so they strive to allow for people with stringent levels of observance to feel comfortable without forcing those who are less observant to adopt restrictions they wouldn’t normally practice.

\textbf{2.4.3 Pluralism at Adamah}

After morning chores, I reported to the cultural center for the first of two work sessions at the wash station. The rain had stopped but I was still damp from walking

\textsuperscript{93} Participant observation, Beit Adamah, July 3, 2015.
\textsuperscript{94} Elisa.
around in a downpour before Lev. As it happens, the wash station is a place where
wetness is inevitable no matter how dry you are when you arrive. I worked with Shana
and Jac to wash produce and separate it out into bins headed for the Community
Supported Agriculture (CSA) customers and the kitchen. In the morning session, we
washed greens. We dumped bunches of kale into a giant washbasin and moved them
around gently to ensure that the water spread throughout the leaves. Romaine lettuce
proved to be the most difficult to wash. Each head was covered in dirt and the leaves
were filled with straw. It took us a while to get fifty-six heads in good shape for the CSA
bins. They didn’t have to be perfect, we imagined that people would wash their lettuce
at home anyway. The lettuce and greens headed to the kitchen would endure more
intensive washes and the bug inspections required in Kosher certified kitchens. Washing
the rainbow chard was the highlight of the work session for me. Bright yellow, orange,
pink, and red stalks of chard interspersed with vibrant green leaves made for a pretty
picture.
As Shana and I headed to the dining hall for lunch, soaked completely through, I thought about the Lev that morning. Adamah is a lot like our giant washbasin of rainbow chard. It houses a community of people with similar interests, values, and goals but they come in various shapes, sizes, and colors.95

Adamah is a pluralistic Jewish community. The fellows come from all different backgrounds and during their time at Adamah, they are exposed to different practices and are offered opportunities to try new things. For example, in Orthodox Judaism, women usually do not wear tallit. At Adamah, anyone who would like to wear a tallit may wear one. Janna Siller, the Adamah Field Manager, told me that she thought the pluralism component of Adamah was one of the most interesting aspects of the program. She had worked on secular farms in Washington State and tended to find that

95 Participant observation, Adamah Cultural Center, July 1, 2015.
while they shared an excitement for local organic produce, their political views were very different from her own. What she likes about Adamah is that it brings Jewish people together. She explained:

And here also something happens with that, where people are encountering each other where they wouldn’t otherwise, because the food kind of speaks to people across this religious spectrum.\textsuperscript{96}

She told me that the cohort of fellows I encountered at Adamah wasn’t a good sample, because in the past come cohorts have included Haredi people and people experimenting with their gender identity living, working, and praying together. Janna stressed that something really interesting is happening at Adamah, and that it happens because the food is bringing Jews together.\textsuperscript{97} Elisa provided an example from her own experience with pluralistic Judaism at Adamah.

I’ve led prayers since I’ve been here, and I hadn’t done anything like that beforehand, because I grew up Orthodox and women weren’t really allowed to do that. So that’s been really cool. I think before coming here I had like, because I grew up Orthodox, I was a little uncomfortable with women leading services, just because it was just unusual to me. But I think I’ve moved past that and I’m curious whether I would still feel uncomfortable if it was in a formal environment. But being here, it’s just been like – I really feel like my spirituality has grown. I love this type of Judaism.\textsuperscript{98}

Elisa wasn’t sure how she would practice Judaism when she returned to finish her senior year at college in the fall. She hadn’t been participating in Jewish life on campus, and still wasn’t sure that was for her. However, she thought that she might seek out a Renewal community. Molly had a similar experience when she was at Adamah as a

\textsuperscript{96} Janna Siller, Interview with author, Isabella Freedman Cultural Center Lawn, July 8, 2015.
\textsuperscript{97} Janna Siller.
\textsuperscript{98} Elisa.
fellow. She remembered that she arrived at Adamah still recovering from time she spent at an Ultra Orthodox Jewish Seminary School in Israel. She had a hard time there, especially with the gender aspects of the program. She had dealt with some judgmental people and with many men who wouldn’t even talk to women. The fact that Molly is a queer woman added to her discomfort there.

It just felt dehumanizing when I was at this seminary, because I would be ignored because I was a woman. Just the idea of being also a young queer woman in an ultra Orthodox place just felt really hard. So when I came here, I was like, oh my God! There was like this queer community of Jews, too, which was kind of huge for me to see that and be like, it’s OK to be who I am and also Jewish. All parts of me are OK and they don’t conflict with each other, even though I was told that they do.99

Molly had sought out Jewish experiences prior to her arrival at Adamah, but none of them had allowed her to fully embrace all of the parts of herself. At Adamah, Molly brought her graduate degree in soil science, her Judaism, and her identity as a queer woman and found a community where every aspect was celebrated. This is not to say that Adamah’s pluralistic community is perfect. One morning a few of the male Isabella Freedman staffers were trying to assemble a minyan. They moved through the campus, seeking ten Jewish adult males, as is required in Orthodox Judaism.100 When they approached Rose, Debby, and I they did not invite us to join them, and instead just asked where the male fellows were. When they found the male fellows, they ignored

99 Molly Zimmerman.
100 Minyans are counted differently in each movement of Judaism. In the liberal Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Renewal movements, Jewish men and women count. Conservative Judaism counts only those who converted or were born to Jewish mothers. Reform, Reconstructionist, and Renewal Jews count those who converted or were born to one Jewish parent.
one of them and pressured the other to join their minyan. In the wake of their departure, Rose explained to the room that the women and the remaining male fellow whose mother is not Jewish were not counted as Jews according to their interpretation of the laws. Complications and difficult moments inevitably arise when Jews from across the spectrum meet. At Adamah, a shared sense of purpose related to food helps the community move through the rough patches to find common ground.

Adamah’s dedication to pluralism extends beyond Judaism. As evidenced by Avodat Lev, practices native to other religious groups like meditation have made their way into Jewish experiences at Adamah. The program has also established a formal relationship with Wake Forest Divinity School. This program started after Fred Bahnson spent time at Adamah while writing his book, *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith.* Shamu recalled that Bahnson connected to the place, and “really thought that we had something to offer the larger, faith-based food and farming movement.” As Director of the Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, Bahnson worked with Shamu to create opportunities for Christian divinity students to visit Adamah and receive course credit. In the Spring, a group of divinity students visited the farm for a week. Rebecca told me that ten students, whose ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s, joined the regular

102 Shamu Sadeh.
Adamah schedule. She said it was “a beautiful opportunity for everybody” and that when the group left, the Adamah staff and fellows were really sad.\textsuperscript{103} Susannah, who was a Springnik liked having the group there because they brought a different perspective to the issues that inspire the Adamaniks.

They were interested in similar things to what you’re interested about how we’re looking, using our faith as a lens to look at food. And they all were passionate about the idea that faith-based organizations should be supporting healthy food, which is great.\textsuperscript{104}

Susannah also talked about how they came to Lev and got really into the Jewish prayer experience alongside the fellows. Shamu remained in awe of the excitement that each new group of people - the Adamahniks and the Wake Forest students - bring to the program and told me that it’s renewing his “own sense of wonder.”\textsuperscript{105} When he sees new people learn about how nature works and see what prayer can look like, it inspires him.

\textbf{2.4.4 Religious Innovation at Adamah}

After a day spent in the rain, and at the wash station, I had grown accustomed to being wet. I had almost dried off by the time we attended our evening class but I was still looking forward to a warm shower after the evening class. However, after the class ended, Simcha and Debby started talking about the fact that there would be a full moon that evening. And they wanted to mark the occasion. I sat with them for a while in the library while they discussed their plan. Simcha and I perused the books on ritual and

\textsuperscript{103} Rebecca Bloomfield.
\textsuperscript{104} Susannah Davidson.
\textsuperscript{105} Shamu Sadeh.
Renewal Judaism to see if we could find any resources for a full moon celebration. We were unsuccessful. Simcha, Debby, and Elisa decided the best way to celebrate would be to go down to the lake and skinny dip by the light of the full moon. I was hesitant about joining them, but Elisa helpfully pointed out that this was a Jewish ceremony, and I shouldn’t miss it. I grabbed my towel and headed down to the dock. When I got there, I found Debby, Elisa, Simcha, Rayna, Susannah, and another Adamah alumna, Beth. We put our bags down and sat in a tight circle at the corner of the dock. It was quite dark and the sky was cloudy. It was about sixty-five degrees outside. The moon was not visible. Rayna started off the very informal ceremony by comparing the Jewish people to the moon. She talked about how the Jewish people have waxed and waned throughout history, sometimes they are powerful and sometimes they are weak, but they are always there. We sang four Hebrew songs about the moon, love, God, and peace. During the fourth song, a faint light began to appear behind a lone tall tree at the top of Barrack Mountain. We started another song to encourage the moon. During the sixth song, the moon cleared the mountain was became completely visible. Our little group erupted into cheers and howls. Someone somewhere else on campus howled back. We stood up and began to undress. We all jumped into the lake together. People swam for a few minutes and then we quickly redressed and headed off our separate ways.

106 New Moons are traditionally celebrated in Judaism. Rosh Chodesh (“Head of the Month”) celebrations mark both the new moon and the beginning of a new month.

107 Participant observation, Isabella Freedman Library and Lake Miriam, July 1, 2015.
There is an enthusiasm about experimenting with Jewish practice at Adamah. Simcha told me that he’d spent a lot of time since his arrival reading books about Hasidism and Kabbalah from the Isabella Freedman library. He was excited by this opportunity to explore. “So I’ve been given the space to read a lot and explore that and understand really what Judaism actually stands for on a much deeper level, but also on a practical level.” He said that his reading had helped his sense of and desire for spirituality to grow. The openness to experimentation also helps the fellows when they are facing difficult moments. Debby found out that her great aunt passed away while she was at Adamah. She was upset after her mom called to tell her so she decided to skip the morning work session and hike up to the overlook.

I wasn’t super close with my great aunt, but I wanted to honor her. She’s also the last remaining person from my mother’s generation. So I just went up there and kind of thought of all of them and each of them. Just felt this – right before I left I was standing and looking over and this like – I’m not going to say it’s like a message. But this thought came to me, and it was like, I am Jewish and I’m proud and I’m not going to be afraid and I’m not going to be ashamed.”

Debby and I both teared up as she related this story to me. She explained that she has been working to navigate her Jewish identity. Her father is an immigrant from Hungary, and she felt she had “internalized fear and shame of being Jewish.” This experience and others at Adamah allowed her to let go of that. The atmosphere that Adamah creates
enables fellows to figure out what Jewish prayers, rituals, and experiences will work for them. And the practices need not have originated in Judaism to be included. Zev told me that he felt like he was learning a lot of Buddhist tenets at Adamah. I asked what he meant, and he clarified, “Just about being in the moment and let things not affect you. Just sort of have a middle ground and be balanced.” The balance that Zev mentions as the key to his experience at Adamah translates to the general approach to Judaism at Adamah. Texts and traditions are balanced with the incorporation of non-Jewish elements that make experiences meaningful for the fellows. This flexibility allows people to feel comfortable in a Jewish community, often for the first time.

Meredith remembered feeling too embarrassed to go to Jewish events before she came to Adamah. She didn’t feel like she was as Jewish as the other people there but at Adamah she found that people could experience their Judaism differently, together.

[N]ow I – I just feel like I’m Jewish. I feel like I could be comfortable in most Jewish spaces. So that’s huge and really the biggest thing. And also just that I love being around Jews. I’m not over it yet. It feels so special to be in a Jewish.

Meredith attributed her love for the Jews at Adamah and her newfound excitement to the connection between Judaism and the work that she does. The interdependence that Shamu makes explicit encourages the fellows to reflect on their work in the field during prayer services and consider their Judaism during their work.

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112 Zev.
113 Meredith Cohen.
That the ways that it’s not separate, that the Judaism and the gratefulness and the awe and the celebration isn’t separate from what we do. It’s like, whoa, this is amazing, what we’re doing. This is a miracle. Science is a miracle and plants are a miracle. Just like the joy – it feels like a place where you’re really allowed to be joyful.\textsuperscript{114}

The joy Meredith identified ran through all of the work sessions, classes, prayer services, and meals that I participated in while at Adamah. The program encourages the fellows to connect to the land, the animals, and their Judaism and each point of connection is meant to bring a sense of awe and joy.

\textbf{2.5 Conclusion}

On Friday afternoons, all of the fellows and apprentices are assigned to work in the Sadeh. This field, which is located down the road from Isabella Freedman, contains four acres of land. About a quarter acre is currently planted. The field is susceptible to flooding during big storms, and the staff decided to stop using the Sadeh as their main field after two catastrophic losses. The most recent and devastating was a complete loss when the field flooded after Hurricane Irene swept through in 2011. Janna referred to the small amount of planting they did at the Sadeh as their “Hail Mary,” they planted a small piece of it and tended to the field once a week. If anything came from it, it would add to their fall harvest. But if something were to happen, they wouldn’t lose everything. We moved through our tasks at the Sadeh quickly. This wasn’t the careful weeding we did in the fields at the Kaplan Family Farm on Beebe Hill. We alternated

\textsuperscript{114} Meredith Cohen.
between hands and hoes to figure out which worked best to pull weeds efficiently. My last day at Adamah, I worked in rows of squash that were so overrun with weeds that the outlines of the squash plants were difficult to discern. I chatted with Molly, Debby, Rayna and Simcha as we worked. They were all tired from a long week and were excited for the rest that Shabbat would bring. After three hours, Janna gathered everyone for closing. We stood overlooking the field and reflected on the week. People shared high points and things that they had learned. We sang. Then we split into two groups - male identified and female identified - and headed off to separate sections of the Housatonic River, which borders the Sadeh and acts as the mikvah (ritual bath) for Adamah. Janna, Molly, Meredith, Rayna, and I stood naked at the edge of the river and shared an intention for the week to come before saying the blessing\textsuperscript{115} and immersing ourselves in the cold river. Immersing oneself in water is a method of purification that they use at Adamah to mark the end of their work-week and the beginning of Shabbat. The mikvah is also used to mark conversions to Judaism. As we floated in the refreshing water, it occurred to me that Adamah serves a similar function. Fellows immerse themselves in this intense program and they tend to leave three months later transformed.

Many of the fellows had heard that Adamah was transformative before they arrived. Rayna reflected that everyone had told her it was “a really transformative

\textsuperscript{115} ברכת אמת יאלה ממל עולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצויינו על מביל
Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, Who sanctifies us with the mitzvot and commanded us concerning immersion.
place,” but she was skeptical. And yet, when we sat down to talk, Rayna acknowledged
a shift. Something that’s happened since I’ve been here is my plans for the future have
dramatically changed.”

She had planned to move to Brooklyn after the program, but a
few weeks into the program she had a loose plan to move to Vermont and work on
cultivating the soil and being as self-sustaining as possible instead. I asked Rebecca why
she thinks the program has been able to inspire people to change their lives.

There’s just something about the program though that’s just really transformative for a
lot of people in a way that I haven’t heard of other programs being. It’s just, like I feel
really connected to anyone who’s done Adamah because we’ve share this – it’s an intense
experience. It’s a really hard schedule. It challenges people physically, emotionally,
spiritually, and so there’s something about that that really brings people together.

The intensity of the program seems to be a key aspect of its success. The fellows live and
work together separated from their friends, family, and daily lives for three months.
They are encouraged to be flexible and open. They are surrounded by natural beauty
and learn new things about their food, their environment, and Judaism every day. These
seem to be the vital ingredients for personal transformation.

There are Adamah alumni all over the world whose lives changed course after
their experience. They have started businesses and non-profit organizations to spread
their knowledge and move the Jews, Americans, and humans towards food justice. I
asked Shamu if this is what he had imagined for the program when he started it in 2004.
He laughed and told me that when the program started “farming wasn’t that popular.

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116 Rayna.
117 Rebecca Bloomfield.
Food wasn’t a thing. There was no Jewish food movement.”118 There is now and Adamah had a lot to do with that. There are now at least five Jewish educational farms spread throughout the country and Adamah alumni work in their fields and offices. The Adamah Alumni that started and run the Shmita Project encouraged American Jews to imagine a year-long sabbatical for agricultural land.119 There are now two companies selling pasture-raised meat and one is owned and operated by a husband and wife team that met at Adamah. Each year since 2006, hundreds of people have gathered annually for the Hazon Food Conference at Isabella Freedman, which has ensured that Adamah remains at the center of the Jewish Food movement. There is a song that we sang frequently throughout my time at Adamah. A Hebrew verse is sung first,120 and then its English translation: “Love the Earth, Love the Sky, Heat of Fire, Drop of Water, I can feel it in my body, In my spirit and in my soul.”121 This song began to feel like the Adamah anthem, in part because the first Hebrew word sung is “Adamah” (“Earth”), but also because the verses indicate the key components of Adamah. The fellows are taught to love to earth, sky, fire, and water that form the basis of the farm and their food system. They learn to feel that love in their bodies through hard work and the consumption of the plants, eggs, and milk they helped bring to their table. Prayer services and classes make the connections between the environment, food, and Judaism explicit and

118 Shamu Sadeh.
119 This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
120 אenciיחי וסמי לוח אוח ציליל הימים אר不间 ואת בנותו בברוח ובשם
accessible though innovated spiritual practices. The Adamah experience transforms spirits and souls by awakening participants to their place within their environment, their food system, and the Jewish community. And, through the continued efforts of a strong network of alumni, Adamah is assisting with the transformation of Jewish food in the United States and beyond.
3. Juice: Live Foods for Living Bodies at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” (Genesis 1:29 KJV)

3.1 Introduction

It takes about a pound of carrots to make eight ounces of carrot juice. During the six days I spent at Hallelujah Acres in June 2015, we had to juice about 100 pounds of carrots. Juicing the carrots was a three-part process. Chef Richard supervised as Danni, Cathy and I peeled the carrots using a carrot peeling tool, juiced the carrots, and drained the juice to remove any remaining pulp. On the other side of the kitchen, Kendall juiced red chard, celery, cucumber, and green apple for green juice. Each day while we were there, we enjoyed a glass of this juice - half carrot and half green - twice a day during our “sun and juice breaks.” Each of these breaks was orchestrated carefully. We were to take our barley max supplement drink first, and then grab our cup of juice and head outside. We were told the sun was good for our health, but we often grumbled and grabbed hats as we left the house. For many of these breaks, we stealthily moved our chairs into the shade to escape the sun as the temperatures climbed into the mid-90s.

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1 All the names of the participants at the health retreat have been changed to protect their privacy. However, I did not change the names of the owners and chefs that run the health retreat because their names and photographs appear on the Hallelujah Diet website and are freely accessible to the public.
However, once we were settled in our matching red Adirondack chairs, we would get to chatting, enjoying our juice and each others company and forget how hot we were. Juice played an important role in the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat because it is a key component of the Hallelujah Diet.

The Hallelujah Diet, which will be discussed throughout this chapter in detail, is based on Genesis 1:29 (quoted above). The diet was founded on the idea that human bodies were created by God to run on nutrients from a mostly raw and plant-based diet. It is the diet that Reverend George Malkmus, founder of the Hallelujah Diet, believes that Adam would have enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before he ate the one fruit that was forbidden him. Malkmus interpreted Adam’s subsequent fall and removal from the Garden as the beginning of a lengthy period wherein humans forgot the diet originally intended for them and their health and lifespans began to decline significantly. In the late twentieth century, Malkmus faced a health crisis and realized that humans had turned away from God’s diet and instead were relying on what he termed the SAD diet, or Standard American Diet. At the retreat another version, Satan’s Alternative Diet, was also used to describe what most Americans eat. Malkmus uses the biblical story of Daniel, who refused to eat the King’s food, to teach American Christians that they don’t have to eat what their neighbors eat. Malkmus wrote that over thirty years ago he

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2 The Hallelujah Diet is the name of both the movement and the book about it. I will italicize the phrase when referring to the book, and not italicize it when referring to the movement.
3 See Daniel Chapter 1.
“made the choice to refuse the king’s food, or what I refer to as the Standard American Diet (SAD) - where we eat like kings at wholesale prices.” Malkmus created the Hallelujah Diet to teach Christians about the alternative to the American consumption of rich and processed food that he believed was the root of the common ailments like cancer, heart disease, diabetes and a number of degenerative illnesses, that plague Americans. Central to Malkmus’s plan is the idea that living bodies need food that is alive. In the words of Malkmus: “L-i-v-i-n-g f-o-o-d. It spells out the basic foundation of The Hallelujah Diet. It is primarily a raw-food diet in which people eat as many foods as possible in their natural, uncooked condition.”

The Hallelujah Diet is a diet based on conceptualizations of human bodies and the living food that should sustain them that are based on a blend of biblical and scientific authority. In practice at the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center, religious and secular sources mingle in classes, film presentations, and informal discussions to encourage people to follow the diet. The Hallelujah Diet is not unique. It fits within a well-documented tradition of Christian dietary reform movements in the United States. This chapter will begin with an overview of the scholarly treatments of these movements and a brief discussion of the historical movement that preceded the Hallelujah Diet. The second section includes information on the creation of The

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6 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 95.
Hallelujah Diet, a description of the diet itself, and the factors that motivate people to try the diet. Following this is an interrogation of the interplay between “new age” ideologies, scientific knowledge, and biblical sources that together form the authoritative foundation of the diet. The fourth section offers insight into the diverse religiosities of Hallelujah dieters. Finally, the chapter concludes with some thoughts on the effectiveness of the Hallelujah Diet.

3.2 Scholarship on the Hallelujah Diet

The Hallelujah Diet has received some scholarly attention but this literature tends to focus on the theological, moral, health, and bodily aspects of the diet. Stephen Nissenbaum’s analysis in his book Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America, focuses on anxieties about sexuality and the body that pervaded nineteenth-century diet reform movements. He highlights the moral issues raised by Graham and those influenced by his teachings.² Daniel Sack also highlighted the moral components of Christian diets in Whitebread Protestants. He explained that “[f]ood carries a moral value in America. In this culture, a particular foodstuff is not only good or bad for your body but also can be good or bad for your soul.”³ Christian diets, especially those that emerged in the nineteenth century, do tend to revolve around the morality of food decisions and the state of stomachs and souls, but they also center on the physical state of human bodies.

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Malkmus included a lighthearted reference to the Christian obsession with the afterlife in *The Hallelujah Diet*. “Although I know Heaven is a better place, I really do enjoy life! I enjoy physical life. I know where I’m going to go when I leave this world; but if it’s just the same to you all, I’d rather put if off a while.”

Malkmus points to a tension here between diets like the one he promotes and the perception that Christians are not interested in bettering their early bodies.

R. Marie Griffith brought bodies into the conversation in *Born Again Bodies*, where she detailed the complicated and intertwined history of body image in America and Protestant Christianity. She touched on The Hallelujah Diet briefly well providing a thorough treatment of American Christian diet movements from Puritans to modern movements in this book. Griffith argues throughout the book that these diets encourage people to strive towards ideal bodies as an act of devotional intimacy. So, the diets are still understood by Griffith as an expression of the human dieter’s relationship with God. She explains how “[p]articipants in devotional diet culture rarely imagine health and thinness as final ends; rather, they pursue bodily fitness as a vehicle for developing close, satisfying relationships with a beloved whom they aim to please through obedient self-discipline.”

This is an interesting argument and it clearly applies to many of the diets that Griffith discussed in detail. However, I did not find that this motivational

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binary held up in practice at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat. People at the retreat were pursuing health and thinness as final ends. They were doing so as part of their relationship with God, but they were not at the retreat to improve or embody that relationship.

Joseph Williams explores the connection between the pentecostal-charismatic movement, faith-healing, and the commodification of divine healing through diets in a chapter titled “Perfect Bodies, Plentiful Profits” in his book *Spirit Cure*.¹¹ The Hallelujah Diet is not aimed primarily or solely at pentecostals and charismatics, but some of the trends Williams identifies in Christian diets do apply to the Hallelujah diet. He notes the tendency of pentecostal and charismatic figures who tap into the U.S. diet scene to offer visions of health and thinness that adhere to therapeutic and physical ideals permeating U.S. culture.¹² As mentioned above, the Hallelujah dieters I encountered had often internalized cultural ideals related to what healthy bodies looked and felt like and losing weight was a high priority for almost all of the participants at the health retreat. Williams also pinpoints a key aspect of the pentecostal-charismatic movement, which is that these Christians are already convinced of “God’s healing power and the availability of a disease-free body” and this primes them for an interest in the “perfectly fit bodies

evident in the U.S. diet culture.” In other words, Christians who have seen God’s healing power in action are more likely to turn to God to heal their own bodies, and believe that the thin and fit bodies they see idealized by these diets as an attainable reality.

Annie Blazer conducted ethnographic research at the same Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat that I visited, but she entered her fieldwork with different interests and came up with conclusions dissimilar from those reported here. Blazer visited the center in 2011 when it was still called Hallelujah Acres and wrote up her experience in a chapter titled “Hallelujah Acres: Christian Raw Foods and the Quest for Health.” She focused on the theological aspects of the diet: “For those who experience healing through changing their diet, belonging to the Hallelujah Acres community affirms a sense of distinction and moral superiority that resembles Evangelical ideology generally.” Blazer’s piece focuses on the ways that the Hallelujah Diet parallels Evangelical ideology and she highlights this sense of moral superiority she found in her time at Hallelujah Acres. My fieldwork revealed the various explanations that deal with aspects of the diet - theological, moral, devotional - in the background at the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center, while other reasons – health, thinness, happiness – were cited as the primary motivation of the participants I encountered. In addition, despite all of this

13 Williams, Spirit Cure, 129.
scholarly attention paid to Christian diets, very little work has been done to assess the actual diets or the people who follow them. As is the case with many aspects of religion, I found that the practice of the diet differed from the prescriptive literature promoting the diet. I seek to fill in some of these gaps in the literature with this study.

It is also important to mention that there are so many Christian diets that overarching explanations tend to generalize what are actually diverse diets with different ideologies and practices. For example, Griffith relies on a conceptualization of “the body” throughout her book that does not fit with “the body” of the Hallelujah Diet. For Griffith, the body is a passive and pliable entity that reflects the status of the relationship of the body’s owner with his or her (mostly her) God. Griffith included research that suggests that Christians in the United States tend to be more obese than their non-Christian counterparts and proposed that this is one of the reasons that Christians seek out diet and fitness plans.¹⁵ A different ideology pervades The Hallelujah Diet. The diet seeks to improve the health of human bodies and fitness and weight loss are a part of that, but they are not the main goal. The key difference is that the Hallelujah Diet seeks to repair bodies with the recognition that the human body is actually an ecosystem that requires the health of numerous different organisms. There is an understanding in the Hallelujah Diet literature and in practice at the retreat center, that for a human to be healthy, all of the cells, bacteria, microbes, and organisms contained

¹⁵ Griffith, Born Again Bodies, 2-3.
within their body must be healthy. The Hallelujah Diet proposes that this bodily system was created by God and that there are certain foods that God intended for sustaining this system, but the health of that system does not rely on the human’s relationship with God. Instead, the health of that system relies on an understanding of the workings of that system and the living fuel that it requires. This will be discussed in detail below.

I provide evidence here that complicates the descriptions of The Hallelujah Diet portrayed by both Griffith and Blazer. Griffith and Blazer both argue that the Hallelujah Diet requires a 100% commitment and they both found a parallel between that extremism and George Malkmus’s Christianity. Griffith noted that “One either adopted the Hallelujah diet in all its entirety or not; as with the particular branch of fundamentalist Christianity Malkmus preached, one was either ‘in’ or ‘out.’”16 She saw a parallel between how foods are described in diets like the Hallelujah Diet and other aspects of secular culture that were rejected by Christians. “The tensions among these programs over which foods to demarcate as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ represent, in a sense, larger disagreements over which parts of so-called secular culture to appropriate and which to reject.”17 Griffith, speaking specifically about The Hallelujah Diet, found that dieters would have to overhaul their lives and accept the diet in full. “Making only a handful of doctor-recommended dietary changes - less red meat - more produce, reduced salt, and

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16 Griffith, Born Again Bodies, 212.
17 Griffith, Born Again Bodies, 212.
so forth - was too half hearted an effort to matter, leaving the dieter as reliant as ever on artificial, cooked and therefore ‘dead’ foods.”\textsuperscript{18} Blazer echoed this idea and listed the three ways that she believes the group uses the diet to distance themselves from the rest of society who are not completely dedicated to the diet. First, she argues that the group “believes that a biblically based raw foods diet is more special and powerful than similar, non theistic raw foods or health food diets.”\textsuperscript{19} Second, she said the group is critical of food practices common in Christian church communities and that they complain about the ignorance of their church friends and leaders, which sets them apart from their fellow Christians.\textsuperscript{20} Finally, Blazer noted that “the group demonizes and criminalizes conventional medicine, presenting the Hallelujah Diet as medically and scientifically superior.”\textsuperscript{21} These three aspects of the diet that Blazer identifies will be discussed further in what follows. Here I will note that these ‘all or nothing’ explanations of the diet do not fit with what I experienced at the health retreat. In the week that I spent at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, I did not get the sense my choice was an either/or in the way that Griffith and Blazer describe. We were encouraged to follow the diet to the best of our ability and to try our best at least to eat vegan and mostly raw. The owners of the center and retreat leaders, Tim and Anita, worked with us to think through solutions to the practical issues we might face at home. For example, \textsuperscript{18} Griffith, \textit{Born Again Bodies}, 212. \textsuperscript{19} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 69. \textsuperscript{20} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 69. \textsuperscript{21} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 69.
a few days into the retreat I asked Anita if she had recommendations for juices that I could purchase because I would be traveling after leaving Hallelujah Acres. She reminded me that juicing my own vegetables would be better, as is recommended in the books, but then she brought me into the kitchen to show me a brand that cold-processes its juice. So, even if it isn’t ideal to purchase juice, it is at least better to purchase juice that hasn’t been pasteurized with heat (and is therefore not raw). In addition, the Hallelujah Diet literature stresses a very strict ratio of raw to cooked foods. In the literature the ratio is given as 85% raw and 15% cooked. At the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat we were told to try and adhere to an 80% raw and 20% cooked food ratio. This was described and practiced there as an estimate. We never calculated the percentages of the food we ate during the week. In general, I found the descriptions provided by both Griffith and Blazer incongruent with how the diet was practiced at the retreat center.

Finally, it is vital to my argument in this chapter and in this dissertation more broadly, to point out that one aspect of Blazer’s argument actually misrepresents the group, and the owners of the retreat center in particular. Blazer writes, “Hallelujah Acres is an example of a subset of Evangelical Christians who use the ideology of distinction to further set themselves above and apart from ‘the world’ and the Christian
There is one key component of this argument that is simply not true. Tim and Anita, who run the center and are quoted extensively by Blazer throughout her essay, are not Evangelical Christians. They are Messianic Jews. Clarifying this single point renders much of Blazer’s subsequent argument tenuous at best. Throughout her chapter she represents everyone in the group as though they were Evangelical Christians and the Hallelujah Diet an expression of their Evangelicalism. But the retreat participants I encountered and the owners of the center complicate this picture significantly. As with all the sites studied here, religion is not uniform on the ground. At the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center, two Messianic Jews teach the fundamentals of a Christian diet to thousands of guests. The majority of those guests are Evangelical Christians, but they have had many other Christians at the center, a number of Messianic Jews, and even a few people who did not identify as religious at all. The religious atmosphere of the retreat center will be explored in detail below. For this reason, considering the diet within a framework of Evangelical Christianity is not the ideal way to discuss a diet that is taught and followed by a much more diverse group of people. And, before we can turn to the complex and dynamic world of the Hallelujah Diet, it is important to highlight a few of the diets that preceded it. There are hundreds of Christian diets so those identified here are the Christian vegetarian diets that closely

23 Annie Blazer verified via email with me that she also dealt with Tim and Anita.
resemble the Hallelujah Diet. George Malkmus does not often reference the Christian diet reformers who came before him, but there are a number of key similarities in their diets that have not been identified by the scholars mentioned above.

### 3.3 Nineteenth Century Diet Reform Movements

When I first read Sylvester Graham’s *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, I was most surprised by his recommendations about liquid intake and the temperature of foods. As I began to realize that this was a common theme in nineteenth century diet reform literature, I still imagined that this was a vestigial dietary recommendation that grew out of nineteenth century physiological studies. I was wrong. At the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, there were a number of rules governing these aspects of our diet. Our food was mainly raw. This was mentioned above and will be discussed in detail below. We were given water bottles upon our arrival and we were encouraged to drink water throughout the day. However, that water had to be distilled water and we could not bring our water bottles to meals with us. We were also told that we should stop drinking water about 30 minutes before meals and not to resume drinking water until about 30 minutes after meals. Meals were to be ingested without the assistance of liquids so the liquids would not impede our digestive process. We were only permitted to put ice in our water once. On Wednesday we went on a field trip - a boat ride on Lake Lure. We were each given a few precious ice cubes to put in our water bottles that melted long before we reached the lake. Hot drinks were similarly discouraged, but the last few
evenings a few of us enjoyed cups of hot herbal tea to help battle issues with congestion and insomnia. All of these recommendations are based on ideas that have been around since the nineteenth century. The basic premise is that food and liquids change the composition of your interior systems. Extreme temperatures have dire effects on those systems and consuming liquids and solid foods together impedes vital processes. In the nineteenth century, these warnings were paired with the idea that hot foods, as well as stimulants and spices, would heat blood and excite passions, awakening the animal nature contained within human beings. These temperature warnings are one of many characteristics that The Hallelujah Diet shares with its predecessors.

In the early nineteenth century, the earliest wave of American vegetarianism swept through the Northeastern United States. Coinciding with the first moments of the Second Great Awakening, this reform movement was explicitly religious in nature. Changing one’s diet was a moral imperative and failing to do so would have consequences in this life and the next. This discourse was based on a collective understanding that “animal” refers to all living creatures that lack self-control, morals, and souls. Relying on a Cartesian mind-body dualism, these writers felt that mind was constantly endangered by dalliances of the body. The control of sexual impulses and general physical health were of utmost importance in this period of urbanization. The purpose early vegetarianism was to control bodies in order to enable individual humans to cleanse their minds and souls.
In 1817, William Metcalfe left England with a small group of Bible-Christians who practiced vegetarianism. He continued to teach about vegetarianism at his church in Philadelphia where he often based his vegetarian views on a familiar biblical verse.

At the very commencement of the book of Genesis we find this plain and important commandment prominently set forth, as one of the laws of direction, essential to the health and happiness of new-created man: *“Behold I have given to you, even every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you shall be for food.”*\(^{25}\)

Genesis 1:29 has been the centerpiece of vegetarian treatises for centuries, so it is no surprise that it became the foundation of the Hallelujah diet. Sylvester Graham, a Presbyterian minister, was influenced by Metcalfe’s vegetarian message that he began lecturing about the dangers of animal foods in the 1830s. He invented the Graham diet and started a movement of Grahamites. In 1850 he helped found the American Vegetarian Society. Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church, also adopted and promoted a vegetarian diet based on Graham’s. These early religious vegetarian leaders focused their teachings and writings on the Biblical support for this diet, and on the subsequent beliefs that adhering to a vegetarian diet would heal human bodies, protect human souls, and end human suffering. These diet reformers were adamant that they had uncovered the true diet meant for humanity. In the words of Asenath Nicholson, a student of Graham and author of the first vegetarian cookbook

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published in the United States, these rules “are built on the broad basis of truth – truth
founded on the immutable laws of nature by God himself.”

Sylvester Graham proposed that humans had turned away from their God-given
diet and that this was killing them. Daniel Sack explained that Graham blamed his own
poor health and that of his fellow Americans “on ignorance of God’s design and the
onslaughts of modern civilization.” He took particular issue with bread made in
bakeries with bolted wheat, which he referred to as “the most miserable trash that can
be imagined.” He informed his readers that bakers use “poor flour” and that they add
chemicals and adulterate their bread with beans, potatoes, and chalk to increase the
weight of the bread. He was also deeply concerned with processed food of all types
and urged his followers to eat foods in their natural, or raw, state.

It is nearly certain that the primitive inhabitants of the earth, ate their food with very
little, if any artificial preparation. The various fruits, nuts, seeds, roots, and other
vegetable substances on which they fed, were eaten by them in their natural state, with
no other grinding than that which was done by the teeth.

Graham was most concerned about wheat, but his interest in “natural state” food is
relevant here. Food served at the wrong temperature was similarly problematic for
Graham. Hot food would agitate the blood and cold food would disrupt digestion. Food
was best eaten raw to avoid these temperature-related issues as Graham wrote, “if man

27 Sack, Whitebread Protestants, 188.
28 Sylvester Graham, A Treatise on Bread, and Bread-Making, (Boston, MA: Light & Stearns, 1837), v.
29 Graham, A Treatise on Bread, and Bread-Making, 42-45.
30 Graham, A Treatise on Bread, and Bread-Making, 10.
were to submit wholly on uncooked food, he would never suffer from the improper
temperature of his aliment.”31 For Graham, food served uncooked and in a state as close
to natural as possible was the ideal.

Sylvester Graham was motivated by a mission to end the human suffering that
he found to be a direct effect of the consumption of animals. He focused a great deal of
his writing on the relationship between the consumption of animal foods and increased
sexual appetite. He believed that eating animal foods altered the state of one’s body and
brought it closer to that of an animal. In his 1839 book *A Lecture to Young Men on
Chastity*, Graham explained that the lower orders of animals do not have the necessary
rational and moral powers to control their sexual appetite. So, by consuming these
animals, humans also fall danger to losing control over their sexual appetites.32 Or to use
Graham’s words, “the body of man has become a living volcano of unclean propensities
and passions.”33 Graham found that the result of this volcano was sexual excess and
disease. He taught young men that when they ejaculate, the shock delivered to their
whole system wears down their bodies over time. He explained to them that when they
released sperm, they were letting go of the substance that gives men their power,
energy, and masculinity.34 Graham also warned women of the inevitable consequence of

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32 Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians*, (Boston, MA: George W. Light, 1839), 38.
34 Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, 51.
suffering they faced in these frenzied men. In addition to the sexual consequences of animal food consumption, Graham taught that sickness could also be prevented, arguing that “disease and suffering are, in no degree, the legitimate and necessary results of the operations of our bodily organs, and by no means necessarily incident to human life.”

Humans don’t need to be sick and Graham taught that there was a simple way to avoid not only disease, but all pain.

If mankind always lived precisely as they ought to live, they would - as a general rule - most certainly pass through the several stages of life, from infancy to extreme old age, without sickness and distress, enjoying, through their long protracted years, health, and serenity, and leave, and individual and social happiness, and gradually wear out their vital energies, and finally lie down and fall asleep in death, without an agony - without a pain.

Graham suggests here that physical suffering was not a required part of the human experience. Graham was adamant that all of the physical pain people were used to could be avoided by abstaining from animal foods. His confidence in this solution was due to its source, God. Graham’s diets became fairly popular in the northeastern states and gained traction in the new religious movements that were flourishing at that time. According to Stephen Nissenbaum, Graham’s teachings “were adopted, directly and virtually intact, by the Seventh-Day Adventists; and on a more secular level, they ultimately led to the rise of the modern American breakfast cereal industry.”

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35 Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, 34.
37 Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America*, 4.
White also highlighted the connection between a diet of animal foods and sexual propensities in her 1865 book, *Health: How to Live*. In a piece about sexual excess, she wrote that “flesh meat is not the right food for God’s people. It animalizes human beings.”³⁸ White warned her readers that consumption of flesh meat results in “animalism.”³⁹ She clarified that this was a negative state because animals are inferior to man.⁴⁰ She continued by explaining that “a development of animalism lessens spirituality, rendering the mind incapable of understanding truth.”⁴¹ Beyond the concern for the souls of individual Christians, White also suggested that the consumption of animal foods was the underlying reason that Christian civilization experienced a slow growth.⁴²

These nineteenth century diet reformers were striving to save souls but they were also concerned about human health and suffering in this life. Graham was clear throughout his lectures. Humans had the tools to live healthy and happy lives free of physical and mental suffering. God had gifted them with the knowledge of what food would nourish their bodies, and according to Graham, animal foods were not on that list. “God made you to be happy. He gave you all your powers and faculties for good; and if you suffer evil, depend upon it, it comes not from the legitimate and undisturbed

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³⁹ White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, Loc. 5537.
⁴¹ White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, Loc. 5537.
economy of your original constitution.” 43 Graham’s ideas bubbled quietly in certain corners of the American religious scene for the next century. Seventh-Day Adventists retained their vegetarian diet, which led to the recognition of their impressive overall health by Dan Buettner, who included their Loma Linda, CA community on his list of “Blue Zones.” 44 However, in the late twentieth century, Sylvester Graham’s teachings rose to the surface once more. Stephen Nissenbaum wrote that “[t]he figure of Sylvester Graham and the movement he helped define have achieved new and unanticipated salience in the 1970s.” 45 He continued to point to the aspects of the modern food industry that led to Graham’s renewed popularity.

These years have witnessed a resurgence of vegetarianism, organic diet, and ‘natural’ subsistence regimen. They have seen an even more widespread anxiety that our individual and collective health is being seriously threatened by a variety of lethal pollutants - invisible chemicals in the food we buy and the air we breathe, carcinogenic radiation suffusing our bodies, dangerous dependence on drugs, tobacco, and a general pattern of overconsumption. Sylvester Graham would surely have understood these fears. 46

The Hallelujah Diet is based on many of the same concerns that Graham raised about processed food in the nineteenth century, and it proposes the same solution. George Malkmus explained: “Friends, I promise you this is not a magic cure. The Hallelujah

43 Graham, A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, 35.
45 Nissenbaum, Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America, xv.
46 Nissenbaum, Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America, xv.
Diet is merely getting back to nourishing the body as God intended and then letting the
body function naturally, the way God designed it. It’s that simple.”

3.4 The Hallelujah Diet: Background

In the summer of 2013, I coerced a friend of mine into coming along with me for
a day of raw food in Charlotte, NC. First on our agenda was the Hallelujah Acres “God’s
Way to Ultimate Health” seminar at the Sheraton Charlotte Airport Hotel. George
Malkmus led this three-hour seminar. During the seminar, Malkmus described his
discovery and early experience with the Hallelujah Diet. He went over some of the
scientific studies that suggest eating raw and vegan food is better for human health. He
shared anecdotes of people he has met who found success with the diet. He called on
people from the audience to share testimonials. He talked about the diet in detail and
offered specific advice in response to questions from the audience. Late in the seminar,
Malkmus responded to a question about how healthy the diet is by showing off his
muscles. Malkmus was in his eighties at the time, and his muscled arms and legs
provided a fairly convincing testimonial all on their own.

After the seminar, we visited the Hallelujah Acres store in Gastonia, NC. The
store is small but well-stocked. A row of juice machines greets customers as they arrive.
Samples of all of the barley max flavors are available at those machines, so I tried them
all. The original barley max flavor, which tastes a lot like eating grass, rather

Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 79.
surprisingly ended up being my favorite. To me, the beet, berry, mint, and carrot flavors
tasted like juice that had been sitting out a bit too long. The memory of tasting all of
those unpleasant flavors stayed with me, so I selected the original flavor for all of my
barley max drinks at the health retreat. The store stocks all the Hallelujah Diet brand
products, and numerous additional health food products, beauty products, and
supplements. You can also purchase juicers, blenders, and other kitchen appliances at
the store. The refrigerators were stocked with fifty-pound bags of carrots and an
assortment of produce. After browsing the store for about an hour, we moved on to a
late lunch at a raw foods restaurant in Charlotte that is not affiliated with the diet. As we
were eating, we overheard the table next to us talking about the Hallelujah Diet. As we
drove home, fresh juices in hand for the road, I answered some of my friend’s questions
about The Hallelujah Diet. The question that stuck with me was related to the difference
between the restaurant where we enjoyed a completely raw lunch and the Hallelujah
Diet. What makes the Hallelujah Diet successful enough to warrant a store, two lifestyle
centers, and thousands of followers? To answer this, I will turn now to the diet’s
backstory and the factors that separate it from similar diets.

In 1976, Reverend George Malkmus was the pastor of a Baptist church in New
York State when doctors found a tumor the size of baseball under his lower left rib. 48

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Malkmus’s mother had recently gone through chemotherapy and radiation treatments for colon cancer and she had died. When he was diagnosed with the same type of cancer, he couldn’t bring himself to take the same medical route that he felt had killed his mother.\textsuperscript{49} Malkmus explained this decision in \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}: “In so many cases, even prayer didn’t seem to make a difference. I had watched some of the most dedicated Christians, who used personal prayer as well as collective prayer, get sicker and often die after going the medical route.”\textsuperscript{50} Malkmus decided to contact an evangelist friend, Lester Roloff, whom he knew to be a “health nut.”\textsuperscript{51} Malkmus switched out cooked food for raw fruits, vegetables, and carrot juice and in 1977 his tumor was gone.\textsuperscript{52} Malkmus noticed other benefits of the diet beyond his disappeared tumor. “By simply switching from the dead-food (SAD) diet of this world, to the living-foods (Hallelujah) diet, I was able to rebuild my eyes sufficiently to no longer require eyeglasses to see clearly.”\textsuperscript{53} Impressed by the results of his diet experiment and inspired by Genesis 1:29, Malkmus began spreading the word. He even gave it a name: “Filled with gratitude, I nicknamed this new (or actually ancient) way of eating, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}.”\textsuperscript{54} Malkmus also coined the term “SAD” for the Standard American Diet.\textsuperscript{55} He published his first book, \textit{Why

\textsuperscript{49} Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet }, 44.  
\textsuperscript{50} Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet }, 44.  
\textsuperscript{51} Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet }, 44.  
\textsuperscript{52} “The Rev. George Malkmus Story.”  
\textsuperscript{53} Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet }, 65.  
\textsuperscript{54} Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet }, 39.  
\textsuperscript{55} “The Rev. George Malkmus Story.”
Christians Get Sick, in 1989. The answer to the question posed by the title is simple: Christians get sick because they eat the same food as non-Christians. According to the Hallelujah Diet website, more than one million copies of the book are currently in print. Malkmus even met his wife, Rhonda, through his diet ministry. A year after Rhonda started the diet, she had lost 80 pounds and saw her severe arthritis vanish. George and Rhonda were married in 1992 and then they worked together to found Hallelujah Acres the same year. Malkmus describes Hallelujah Acres, the organization that promotes the Hallelujah Diet as “a Christian ministry that teaches health from a biblical perspective!”

The Hallelujah Acres ministry has grown significantly since its founding. The organization is now run by Paul Malkmus, George and Rhonda’s son. Hallelujah Acres has corporate offices in the United States, Canada and Nigeria. The organization’s initiatives include the store in Gastonia, training seminars in churches all over the country, weekly emails, informational books, recipe books, videos, a product line, and two health retreat centers. Upon learning the cost of the week-long health retreat, $1,295, I worried that I would not be able to attend. I was able to piece together the package price but for many people the price of this program would be prohibitive. Many of the participants who I spoke with during the week mentioned that they had saved up for

56 “The Rev. George Malkmus Story.”
57 “The Rev. George Malkmus Story.”
58 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 56.
the program and were sure the diet would stick because they had already invested so much. Add to that the cost of all the necessary kitchen appliances, the required Hallelujah Diet brand supplements, and the produce required and this diet is only available to certain sectors of the population. The Hallelujah Diet has become a commercial enterprise and their catalog sells all of these items and more to those who can afford it. Throughout the literature, this is addressed. Malkmus reminds his readers frequently that medical care costs more than fresh vegetables. Throughout this diet empire, one common theme pervades: The Hallelujah Diet is all about the food. The current tagline on the Hallelujah Diet website reads: “Fall in love with food again.”

3.5 Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat

The Hallelujah Diet is in the midst of a branding shift. In July, 2014, the emails from the organization started coming from “Hallelujah Diet” instead of “Hallelujah Acres.” The “health retreats” were formerly known as “lifestyle centers.” I asked Anita, who co-owns and runs the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat that I attended in Lake Lure, NC, about the name change. “We were called formerly Hallelujah Diet Lifestyle Center. But we have changed that to the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, because Hallelujah Acres, the Acres has been removed. It’s not a farm. It’s a dietary approach that is being

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41 The website still uses the language “lifestyle center” but all the language at the actual center was “Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat”
Anita and her husband Tim have owned and run the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat since October 2006. Their son Richard shares the title of Head Chef with Tim. Together, the three of them run week-long programs, like the one I attended, two-week programs, and the “Raw Gourmet Living Culinary Academy,” a one-week program. Anita learned about the Hallelujah Diet one day in 2002 while she was working in the marketing department at a Florida Whole Foods. She was interviewing customers, but one of her customers began interviewing her and told her about the diet. Anita said that he had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and was sent home to die. Anita says she met him six or seven years after that. His testimony and the hundreds Anita found when she did research later at home convinced Anita to give the diet a try. Anita had searched for the perfect diet for many years. She studied nutrition and fitness, spent many years teaching dance therapy, macrobiotic nutrition, and herbal remedies and ran a natural foods restaurant on Long Island, NY but she hadn’t found a diet worth sticking to until she learned about the Hallelujah Diet. Anita explained, “I knew immediately that it was what I had been searching for. I have never doubted its tenets since then, and have had the good fortune, the blessing of being able to see by our experience here, the nine years practically that we’ve been here, that it works.” Anita and her husband Tim started the diet and became health ministers in 2003. They were holding mini-retreats in

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63 Anita Koch.
their home in Boynton Beach, Florida and searching online to find a place where they could start their own lifestyle center when they learned that the lifestyle center in Lake Lure, NC was going to be sold. Anita described her reaction when they got the phone call asking them to take over the center at Lake Lure: “It was an answer to prayer. We believe that God put us here. We’re certainly glad and grateful that He has.”

Anita told me that they have had 1,400 guests at their center since the beginning. Anita and Tim teach classes throughout the week at the retreats and they provide resources in the form of handouts, powerpoint slides, videos, discussions, articles, and the information they have personally acquired through their years of experience. Despite the wealth of knowledge they provide, Anita stressed that it is not important that people remember every detail, but rather that they get the gist of it. Anita recalled a story from when she and Tim attended the health minister training. Tim was standing on stage with George Malkmus and in response to a question Malkmus posed, Tim responded: “It’s really simple, folks. It’s fruits and vegetables, seeds and nuts and some grains. That’s it. Don’t adulterate it. Eat as close to the garden and to the natural foods as you can.”

Tim’s overview of the diet is pretty simple, but in practice, the diet is more complex.

64 Anita Koch.
65 Anita Koch.
66 Anita Koch.
67 Anita Koch.
3.6 Wholly Alive

I was worried about being hungry at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat. Before arriving, I spent four weeks decreasing my coffee intake from four cups a day to none. We were asked to start eliminating animal foods from our diets prior to our arrival to lessen the impact of detox symptoms during our week at the center. I had already been a lacto-ovo vegetarian for four years at that point, so I figured cutting out dairy and eggs for the week wouldn’t be too difficult. What I was worried about was the raw food. I wasn’t really looking forward to what I imagined would be a week of salads. We all arrived on a Sunday in the late afternoon. We settled into our rooms, unpacked, and introduced ourselves. Anita led our first class to introduce us to the basics of the diet and to the retreat center. When we were told to move into the dining room for dinner, I was hungry and a bit nervous. What I found was a beautiful table set for twelve. Huge platters of bright green raw zucchini manicotti adorned with raw tomato sauce provided an impressive centerpiece. Large serving bowls of broccoli and pea salad and Italian salad were interspersed with the manicotti platters. Tim led us in a quick prayer and we started passing around the food. Almost immediately, the table filled with audible gasps and excited reactions. The manicotti was remarkable. A cashew filling stood in for cheese and provided a creamy and salty counterpart to the bright crispy zucchini and the bold flavored tomato sauce. Dessert came in the form of a sweet and hearty raw
carrot cake. The food was filling and satisfying and I hadn’t imagined that we would get
dessert. I settled in and started to look forward to meals.

That first meal, and many others we enjoyed at the health retreat, was wholly
alive. “Wholly alive” is a phrase that Anita and Tim use to describe the diet. They
started a website a number of years ago to promote the “wholly alive” lifestyle that one
gets when they follow the Hallelujah Diet. George Malkmus dedicated a large portion of
The Hallelujah Diet to the importance of eating food that is alive. He began with this
description.

In the Garden of Eden, God revealed that all animals - including humans - were designed
to take energy directly from plant life. That was the most direct path to transferring
power from pure light into a form that would sustain life itself! Just think about it - the
life-force in a plant is sustained by collecting sunlight via photosynthesis. That life-force
is then transferred directly to the human’s physical body that consumes the plant - like a
flame passed form one candle to another. This is the simple yet brilliant way God
designed to pass along the life-giving energy from one living thing to another in the form
of living foods.68

For Malkmus living food is food filled with life-force, which is a type of energy that
Malkmus attaches to the plants via their photosynthetic processes. Malkmus goes on to
remark that despite this system set up by God, humans set up advanced civilizations
wherein they learned to cook and kill their food.69 Incredulous at the ignorance of
mankind, Malkmus continued, “We share this planet with over 700,000 other species of

68 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 91.
69 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 91.
animals, but we are the only ones who have tamed fire in order to cook our food.”

Malkmus also listed the damage inflicted upon food in the cooking process: “enzymes are lost, proteins are denatured, heated oils and fats convert to trans-fatty acids, which are carcinogenic, sugars are caramelized, vitamins and minerals become less available, water is reduced, and fiber is refined to the point of losing much of its benefit.”

The conceptual argument that Malkmus makes is interesting for two reasons. First, it is curious to call plants and fruits that have been uprooted from the ground or picked off trees, plants or bushes “alive.” Malkmus suggests that his readers try an experiment to prove that these types of foods are alive. He asks them to cut the tops off five carrots. They should leave one raw, boil one, steam one, bake one, and microwave one. Then all five should be placed in separate glasses of water. The raw carrot will sprout and the others will not. For Malkmus this proves that the raw carrot is alive and the others are dead. This is a great experiment for carrots, but the same would not work with apples or kale or most of the fruits and vegetables that make up the Hallelujah Diet. Malkmus amends his definition of alive by noting that the enzyme content is the key. “Living foods still contain their life-force, which is indicated by the presence of active enzymes. Those enzymes supplied in all living foods are crucial to

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20 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 92.
21 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 92.
22 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 93.
proper digestion and absorption of the nutrients found in that food.” Here Malkmus equates the presence of a food’s “life-force” with the presence of active enzymes. This is persuasive, but do active enzymes really distinguish between what is alive and what is dead? Malkmus would not permit dieters to eat yogurt so there are still some blurry edges to his argument. Malkmus also pinpoints a specific temperature at which food moves from being alive to being dead.

At 107 degrees Fahrenheit, the enzymes - the life-force within the food - start to break down and die. By 122 degrees Fahrenheit, all enzymatic activity is gone - the food is dead. At 150 degrees Fahrenheit, the protein molecules start to become altered and die. By 160 degrees Fahrenheit, the molecular structure of protein is totally changed. Here we have information that allows us to pinpoint the exact moment when our food will change from being alive to being dead. At 122 degrees Fahrenheit, enzyme activity is gone and food is dead. This food is no longer acceptable for human beings, because, according to Malkmus, “[a] body is comprised of living cells, which were designed by God to be nourished with living food!”

The second compelling aspect of Malkmus’s conceptualization of live food is that the diet does not actually consist completely of “live” foods. In the book, Malkmus proposes an 85% raw 15% cooked food ratio. At the retreat center we were taught 80% raw and 20% cooked foods. Either way, dead foods are being consumed. It turns out the allowance for dead food was a concession. Malkmus explained, “I used to teach all raw,

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74 Malkmus, *The Hallelujah Diet*, 94.
75 Malkmus, *The Hallelujah Diet*, 60.
and people were cheating, feeling guilty about it, and then falling away altogether. So we started adding a little cooked food at the end of the evening meal. And we started getting the same, if not better results than the 100-percent raw diet we had previously been teaching.”  

So, the diet that strictly distinguishes between live and dead food and goes to great lengths to discourage people from eating dead food actually allows people to consume 15-20% of their diet in dead foods. More fascinating is the fact that this concession occurs without the usual biblical and scientific evidence that Malkmus relied so heavily on throughout his book. Rather, we are offered a psycho-social explanation - people cheat less if they are permitted to eat some cooked food each day. Whatever the reason, Malkmus appears to have conceded 15% of his diet to dead foods and readers are left to assume that the raw foods they are eating are enough to nourish their living cells. Malkmus sums it all up simply: “In a nutshell, we need to eat a diet rich in living foods in order to fuel the living cells that comprise the physical bodies God gave us: Living Food = Living Fuel —> Living Cells = Healthy Body”

With an understanding of what makes the Hallelujah Diet wholly alive, we proceed to other aspects of the diet. This is a diet that, as mentioned in the introduction, requires a lot of juice. Curious readers may wonder how a diet based on the foods available to Adam in the Garden of Eden came to rely rather heavily on juicing, an

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76 Malkmus, *The Hallelujah Diet*, 129.
77 Malkmus, *The Hallelujah Diet*, 141.
activity that requires modern equipment. Malkmus informs his readers that our produce today simply does not live up to the standard of the food available to Adam: “even those fruits and vegetables grown under superior organic growing conditions today are nowhere near as nutritious as the vegetables man grew in our ancient soils.” As mentioned above, living cells need living nutrition and they need a lot of it. Malkmus lets his readers know that they need to plan for this inevitable situation by consuming more food. This is an easy enough solution, except that eating fruits and vegetables continuously throughout the day isn’t really an option for most people. Malkmus had a solution to this problem. “Even if your digestive system is in the optimum working condition, it isn’t able to process all the raw food you need in a full day. The answer to this problem is to do the first part of the processing before consuming it - through juicing!” So, juicing kick starts the processing so the nutrients can be sent directly into the bloodstream. Through juicing, living cells gain direct access to the nourishment they need.

In addition to the rules about raw food, there is a complete ban on animal products. Malkmus was adamant that animal products are an unacceptable source of nourishment. “The single most destructive thing you can put into your body is something of an animal origin: beef, poultry, seafood, milk, cheese, and eggs - anything

29 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 161.
30 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 161.
that comes from something with a face.”81 Malkmus offers many reasons for human abstention from meat. First, meat is dead.82 And not just dead, but cooked and empty of the fiber that would allow them to be digested quickly.

Thus, animal foods move sluggishly through the digestive tract, in an atmosphere of 98.6 degrees, and they putrefy! This putrefied flesh causes physical problems that range from body odor to acid stomach problems, to Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), to colitis, to ulcerated colitis, to crones disease, to colon cancer.83

The second reason Malkmus offers is his assertion that humans are not the omnivores they claim to be. He offers detailed charts that show humans to be closer in physical structure to herbivores than carnivores. Finally, Malkmus informs his readers that the meat available to Americans is particularly unacceptable: “Diseased meats are everywhere in our mass-produced food supply.”84 Meat production will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but I will say here that about half of the videos we watched while at the health retreat dealt with the state of the meat and dairy industries and the health benefits that await those willing to forsake those industries. Finally, Malkmus also prohibits the consumption of white sugar, white salt, white flour, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and narcotics. The white foods are prohibited for the processed nature and the chemical additives that make them white. Malkmus explained, “To no great surprise,

81 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 114.
82 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 113.
83 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 53.
84 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 113.
after years of consuming such ‘Franken-foods,’ our bodies react to all those chemicals by getting sick.”

The Hallelujah Diet is based on a simple principle - eat mostly raw foods - but it is not simple to start. We spent a large percentage of our time at the health retreat working on our knife skills, learning to use new kitchen appliances like juicers and spiralizers, and identifying foods we were not familiar with. We attended an entire class on how to set up a natural foods kitchen and another session was spent on quizzes where we had to identify grains, vegetables, fruits and spices from images and baggies containing the mystery items. Tim explained to me the motivation behind spending so much time in the kitchen.

I want to send them home with the confidence that they can do this in their kitchen. I want to show them in our kitchen how we set up to make a recipe, how the kitchen is laid out, where the pantry is, where the ingredients are, what ingredients we use, and help them realize that this is something that everyone can do in their home, and you don’t need to be an expert in anything. You just need some basic tools and a desire to stick with the diet.

According to Tim with some basic information and experience in a well-stocked kitchen we would be ready to go home and get started. There were also pieces of the Hallelujah Diet that we were exposed to at the health retreat that are not related directly to the food, and are likely more difficult for people to maintain at home. Every day at

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85 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 37.
87 I personally came home to a kitchen with no juicer, no spiralizer, an old hand-me-down blender that can sometimes produce a smoothie properly, and a graduate student budget that cannot accommodate the purchase of these items.
the retreat center we enjoyed morning walks, breathed in plenty of fresh mountain air, enjoyed the afternoon sun as we relaxed with juice that had been made for us, and had plenty of time to sleep eight full hours each night. Perhaps most importantly, the stress of our daily lives was home where we left it. We tracked all of this information in daily logs and were told to also be sure we were “eliminating” waste each day. Fiber cleanse supplements were meant to assist us with this process and ensure that we were having daily bowel movements. These conditions make for a great week to learn about the diet and detox from our SAD diets, but upon arrival back at home, many of these prescriptions for a balances life seem to be the first to fall away. However, the motivation that drives people to the Hallelujah Diet often gives them the perseverance to maintain the diet.

### 3.7 Healing Bodies

Health was the major motivating factor that brought people to the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat during the week I was there. I interviewed each participant at the center and asked all of them why they decided to come to the retreat. An interest in improving their health came up first in every single interview. However, it wasn’t necessarily just their own health that encouraged them to participate. In my experience at the retreat, these two reasons are an accurate representation of the participants. I was

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88 This is based on emails that the participants exchanged after the retreat. Family and work stresses reared up, exercise was not as plentiful, and food became harder to prepare when people no longer had all day to do it.
actually surprised when I arrived at the health retreat and found the other participants to be in relatively good health. Reading the Hallelujah Diet literature, as well as Blazer’s account, I thought I would be spending the week with terminally ill people. That was not the case during the week I was there. One participant had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, and another with heart problems, and others were struggling with weight gain, but for the most part our group was looking for preventative health information. Lori and Calvin decided to come to the retreat center when Lori was diagnosed with breast cancer. She told me that she was planning to go through with the lumpectomy her doctor scheduled for the next week but that she had “determined years ago that if this should ever happen to me, that I would not take chemo.” Calvin had heart problems and recently had two stents put in. He was taking a blood thinner and had been told by his doctor that the medication was the only option. The Hallelujah Diet was recommended to Lori by a friend, so she and Calvin decided to come and “learn how to eat the healthiest way possible.” They were both hoping that the diet would provide an alternative to the medical options they had been offered. Danni, a medical doctor in her fifties, had been through a similar raw foods program before, but she had not been able to stick to the program. She explained, “I came to Hallelujah Acres to see if I could detox and transform my mind to be able to wrap around potentially

89 Lori, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
90 Calvin, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
91 Lori.
eating better so that I could be healthier and have a body that was able to be functional to do all sorts of exciting things in my last half of my life.” Another couple, Mike and Faith, were health ministers looking to get back on the Hallelujah Diet. They went on the diet twenty years ago after Faith had a lumpectomy for breast cancer. A nutritionist told her that George Malkmus was coming through town so they went to see him. Faith remembered that they had decided quickly to try the diet and see if it would work. Her breast cancer has been in remission for those twenty years, but they stopped following the diet about ten years ago and noticed that “things started going south as far as our health was concerned.” Mike sounded a bit remorseful as he described their experience over those ten years.

We have all the books that Hallelujah Acres ever recommended or published. Tapes and DVDs. We have all the information, and the worst part about it is we haven’t been doing what we know we should have been doing for 10 years. We just dabble. What we’ve been doing has kept us afloat from getting any serious problems, but it’s catching up to us. It has.

The Hallelujah Diet does not work well as a temporary solution, and Mike and Faith had found that their health deteriorated as they moved away from the diet’s precepts. Mike and Faith knew the best way to get their health back was to come to the center to “get kick started.” Mike and Faith were enthusiastic participants and helpful resources for the rest of the participants during the week. Mike even sent us a recipe for a sandwich

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92 Danni, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
93 Faith, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
94 Mike, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
95 Mike.
96 Mike.
spread made out of the pulp the juicer leaves behind a few weeks after we left the
center.

There were also a few people in our group who were interested in gathering the
information for themselves but also for a loved one back home. One participant, Cathy,
had traveled to learn more about the diet after her mother told her about it. Her family
has some health issues and her mother fought cancer with alternative treatments and is
still living almost fifty years later. Cathy figured this was a sign that her mother was
doing something right. Cathy, who is in her forties, thought she would come learn more
about the diet to see if she could prevent some of the health issues her family members
were facing. Cathy also hoped to bring the information home to her mother, who was
not feeling well enough to travel. Kendall came to the center after realizing that her and
her husband’s health and eating habits had gotten out of control due to job stress.97
Kendall had participated in a study “many years ago” for people with fibromyalgia.
Michael Donaldson, who holds a doctorate in chemical engineering and works as the
Hallelujah Diet Research Director conducted the study.98 Kendall was impressed with
the results she saw in that study, “I have – had very mild fibromyalgia, and the diet
pretty much cleared it up.”99 Although Kendall was interested in going back on the diet
herself, she was mostly looking to help her husband. We learned a lot about Kendall’s

97 Kendall, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 23, 2015.
98 Kendall.
99 Kendall.
husband throughout the week. He works in a quarry, blasting rocks. He works long hours, his workplace is very hot, he eats standing up, and he commutes for hours a day. Tim and Anita worked with Kendall throughout the week to figure out creative ways to send healthy food along with him to work. The final participant was my roommate for the week, Erica. She was in her fifties and told me that she came because she was “very overweight” and had high blood pressure and high cholesterol. She had started reading about the Hallelujah Diet about twenty years ago and was pleased with the testimonies she read. She was also very interested in the diet because her husband had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis six years ago and she was hoping to learn about the diet and convince him to go on it as well. The participants at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat were looking to improve their own health and the health of those around them but no one was struggling with a life-threatening crisis like those I had read about in testimonials. Anita informed me that this was fairly normal for their center. They get a mix of serious illness, people just looking to improve their health, and people like Mike, Faith and Kendall who have experienced the diet but needed a reminder.

We’ve seen others healed from brain cancer, from every type of cancer, form diabetes, which is relatively speedy one to heal, osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, and just brain fog. And a lot of people that came here because they were seeking better health in general. Nothing life threatening, but they wanted better health. We’ve had a number of people come through our program a number of times, because they really enjoy coming is the

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reason some of them come back. They want a healthy retreat, or they may have fallen off the wagon for a time and realized first hand by natural consequences that they need to get back to the diet and they need some motivation and a good kick in the pants.102

The aspects identified here are what bring people to the health retreats: a desire for better health, motivation, and a way to get started. Tim suggested that people tend to get comfortable and eat what they like, until something happens that forces them to consider a change. At that point, he said they often remember things they’ve heard before about juicing and raw food and then they seek out a solution like the Hallelujah Diet. Anita also stressed an important aspect of the health retreat.

This is an education facility. It’s not a clinic. We’re here to teach people what they can do themselves. Nobody heals anybody. People heal themselves by feeding their bodies correctly and their minds and all of that. It’s emotional, it’s mental, and it’s physical and spiritual. We try to address all of those issues.103

Anita touched on a key component of the Hallelujah Diet here. It is an individual effort. If you follow the proper diet, you will be healed. Anita’s statement also brings up another complicated aspect of the Hallelujah Diet - it is not a clinic. Authority at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat comes from various sources.

3.8 Authority & Evidence in the Hallelujah Diet

3.8.1 No New Age for Me

I had a cold the whole time I was at the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat. Tim and Anita thought I might be detoxing from dairy products. I thought that my allergies

103 Anita Koch, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 25, 2015.
might be reacting to something in the mountains. Either way, my nose was running, my
throat hurt, and I was not feeling well. After about a day with the cold, my roommate
Erica asked me if I wanted to use some of her essential oils. I was unfamiliar with
essential oils, so she had to teach me how to use them. First, I was supposed to rub oil on
the soles of my feet and under my nose. Then I was to apply the essential oil “thieves.”
This particular oil was supposed to be good for my immune system. It contains clove
and rosemary oil and got its name from the thieves who used to wear it while they
robbed dead bodies. The oils felt refreshing on my skin and thieves smells amazing. I
applied the oils each night for the rest of the week. My cold persisted. Anita offered
liquid silver. I was very wary of drinking silver, but Anita was convincing so I started
taking a spoonful twice a day. Silver tastes exactly like I imagined drinking silver would
taste. Metallic, oddly cool, and like something that shouldn’t be consumed. Towards the
end of the week, Kendall and I began enjoying an evening cup of tea. I chose the
immune support tea each evening. My cold/detox symptoms went away after a few
days. The various alternative remedies I was offered at the retreat center to combat my
cold exemplify an interesting dynamic that persists there. Evidence is drawn from
numerous sources for all an array of health and nutrition based issues, but authority is
only granted to two sources - the Bible and certain types of science. In addition, one
particular source was repeatedly dismissed as having no authority. The participants and
our hosts referred to this source as “New Age.” Throughout the week New Age
practices became the antithesis of the Hallelujah Diet. And yet, many practices used and
prescribed at the health retreat are common in the New Age arenas the Hallelujah Diet
strives to differentiate itself from. Similarly, science is alternately acceptable and the
work of Satan. Authority within the Hallelujah Diet depends on whether the evidence in
question works with the biblical text. It doesn’t have to be mentioned explicitly in the
Bible, but evidence cannot compete with the Bible.

When I started telling friends I was going to a center to learn about raw food,
veganism, and alternative remedies, the phrase New Age came up frequently as they
tried to grapple with where I was going. At the Hallelujah Diet, there is an awareness
that many of the practices incorporated into the diet and lifestyle are shared with those
in the New Age movement, as they understand it. “New Age” for the Hallelujah dieters
is a combination of therapeutic practices like yoga, philosophies borrowed from
Buddhism and Hinduism, and spiritual practices that have the potential to lead one
away from Christianity. The status of the Hallelujah Diet as an alternative to similar new
age centers came up frequently in interviews when I asked why people chose to come to
Lake Lure. Erica told me that she knows “there’s a lot of New Agers” in alternative
healthcare and that she “wasn’t interested in that.” The fact that the Hallelujah Diet had
a Christian background was really important to her. Kendall had some previous experience with new age trainings and chose the Hallelujah Diet for that reason.

I would not have gone to a new age center. I get enough of that through my yoga. I just – I don’t agree with the philosophy, so it would have been very uncomfortable for me. I’ve gone to a lot of yoga trainings and I just have to go along with things that I don’t really believe in, just so I get the certification. I wouldn’t want to go into that for lifestyle change and important food.

Kendall put up with New Age places to get her yoga certifications, but for her a diet and lifestyle change was too important to deal with at a New Age place. Danni chose the Hallelujah Diet because the retreat center was in driving distance, but also because being at a Christian retreat place would allow her to relax. She explained, “at a New Age place, then I have to think about whether this is something I want to participate with or something I want to go do something else with.” Danni had been to another raw food retreat that she had not found very relaxing. “They claimed to be Christian, and they used scriptures, but they taught about all the New Age practices. In a sense that was a good thing for me to learn about, and be exposed to, but I want to cleanse my spirit as much as my body.” Danni echoed Kendall’s thoughts and implied that a Christian place would allow her to be herself and work on her body and her spirit. Annie Blazer heard similar concerns according to her account of her time at Hallelujah Acres. She wrote, “Cynthia had explored another raw foods cancer treatment center but thought it

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104 Erica.
105 Kendall.
106 Danni.
107 Danni.
was too full of ‘new age junk.’”108 I asked Anita if they had participants come through their center in the past that were interested in New Age practices. She remembered one particular participant that had struggled in her time at the center.

We’ve had some people who were ascribing to New Age philosophies. One gal who came here for two weeks, and she brought all these candles and all these booklets about a lot of New Age philosophies. And she wanted to be able to talk about her philosophies, and felt that we were squelching her. But it wasn’t just us.109

Anita reminded the woman that the diet is biblically-based and that she could not share her philosophy because there was no place for it at the retreat center. They ended on good terms and Anita says she still hears from her and that they remain friends.110 So what is the difference between candles and booklets about New Age philosophies and essential oils and liquid silver remedies? The practices that are acceptable within the framework of the Hallelujah Diet are those that are biblically verifiable. A raw and vegan diet is, as we have seen, justified by the Book of Genesis. Essential oils are used throughout the Old and New Testaments. Young Living Essential Oils, the company that produces the oils that both Erica and Anita use and sell as members, offers the “Twelve Oils of the Ancient Scripture Kit” on their website.111 Tim offered a simple way to think about the new age issue in relation to veganism, “it’s not a New Age concept. It’s an Old Age concept. It was in the Bible originally. And it’s OK.” Tim’s clarification

109  Anita Koch.
110  Anita Koch.
sums up the incorporation of new age practices at the Hallelujah Diet quite well. Those that are in the Bible are ok. Those that espouse a different philosophy or encourage practices that cannot be found in the Bible are not acceptable for Hallelujah Dieters.

3.8.2 Science and The Bible

George Malkmus and our retreat leaders dealt with science in a similar way. If the science works in conjunction with the biblical precepts, then it is acceptable and is often utilized to bolster the evidence of the bible for the importance and effectiveness of the Hallelujah Diet. During our week at the retreat, we watched at least one video a day. All of the videos featured medical doctors, either as the main speaker given a lecture, or as interpolated talking heads who were there to lend authority and scientific proof to informational videos about fighting cancer, juicing, and the dangers of dairy and meat. As we sat comfortably on the couch and watched these videos, the other participants would often take notes, chat with each other about facts that were raised by the videos and exclaim “yes” or “mm hmm” when they agreed with the speaker. One evening we were watching a particularly long video about the dangers of eating meat. Everyone was interested in the video and a few people were writing down key facts to bring home to their families. Towards the end of the video, there was a section about the environmental effects of the meat industry. To introduce this section, the narrator said something about how the earth had been around for billions of years. There were audible gasps. The tone of the room shifted and the group ended up turning the video
off shortly thereafter in favor of getting to sleep. As we gathered our binders and water bottles to head to our bedroom, I asked Erica what she thought of the video. She said she thought it was interesting, but that she wasn’t so sure how true it all was. It seems that the mere mention that the earth has been around longer than 6,000 years was enough to call the authority of this video into question.

Blazer suggested that moments like the conversation I had with Erica characterize the Hallelujah Diet. “This use of secular materials demonstrates a central tension within Hallelujah Acres’s reeducation: Hallelujah Acres presents doctors in general as ignorant or blatantly evil yet relies on credentialed experts to support its dietary recommendations.”¹¹² Rather than viewing this as a tension, I prefer to approach this interplay of religion and science at the Hallelujah Diet as an entanglement common to all the groups I discuss in this project. George Malkmus, the retreat leaders, and the participants were all working through a process wherein they are culling evidence from different sources and seeing what works well together, and what might not. Even Blazer assents to the fact that scientific sources are used frequently at the retreats. “Very few of these DVDs were made from a Christian perspective, and all featured doctors, scientists, and researchers.”¹¹³ This partnership between religion and science, often interpreted as a tension by scholars like Blazer, are actually a key example of the effects of the entangled

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space groups like the Hallelujah Diet occupy. It is also important to clarify what “science” and “medicine” mean in the context of the Hallelujah Diet to understand the context of this conversation. Blazer argued that “Hallelujah Acres demonstrates a conflicted relationship with medical science.”\textsuperscript{114} She continued, “The leaders of the organization reject traditional medical treatments but use doctors and scientific experts to justify this rejection.”\textsuperscript{115} As Blazer makes clear here, the Hallelujah dieters are not really rejecting medicine as a whole, they are rejecting certain medical treatments in favor of others. “Medical Science” is not a cohesive united field any more so than “Religious Studies” is. I would alter this statement and say that the Hallelujah Diet has a complicated relationship with medical science. There are aspects of medical science that are abhorrent to George Malkmus, as is the case with traditional cancer treatment practices. However, we watched an entire video about the evils of the “cancer industry” and the alternatives available through medical professionals who are interested in nutritional approaches to treating cancer. So, it is not a tension, so much as language in need of clarification. The Hallelujah Diet in generally opposed to medical science that involves the addition of chemicals into the body, but permits and promotes medical professionals and treatments that have an herbal or nutritional basis. In addition, as I saw with Lori and Faith, on the level of practitioners, there is often a separate form of

\textsuperscript{114} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 72.
\textsuperscript{115} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 80.
compromise. They both had lumpectomies and refused chemotherapy and radiation.

Lori offered her approach to making medical decisions:

We don’t like to take medicine of any kind. We’re afraid of medicine and what it does to our bodies. I’ve been taking lisinopril for my blood pressure for years now, and I even wonder if it had some effect on my body, the toxin from that that’s gone to my breast and done that.¹¹⁶

Lori was wary of medicine, but decided to accept blood pressure medication from her doctor. Now that she has a tumor, she is wondering if the medication she agreed to take actually made her sick. Lori’s example offers us a window into how complicated medical decisions can be. Even when we don’t want to take medicine or have surgery, there are moments when a compromise must be made. The status of medical science in the Hallelujah Diet is complex and can’t be categorized with a generalized claim.

Malkmus actually addressed this issue in The Hallelujah Diet: “As a preacher, I have learned to weigh the council I get from science against the wisdom from another, even higher source.”¹¹⁷ The higher source here is God and the Bible. But, once Malkmus verifies science using his higher sources, he proclaims that science in every mode the Hallelujah Diet offers. One example is his cross-promotion of Dr. T. Colin Campbell’s China Study.

If you haven’t already done so, please get Dr. T. Colin Campbell’s book, The China Study. Dr. Campbell is an eminent scientists who has spent most of his adult life researching the relationship between diet and disease; and after 40 years of scientific research, he

¹¹⁶ Lori.
¹¹⁷ Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 68.
concludes that even small intakes of animal products are associated with significant increases in chronic degenerative diseases.\footnote{Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}, 119.}

Beyond promoting Campbell’s book, Campbell was also given the opportunity to write a forward in \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}. In this forward, Campbell acknowledges that he and Malkmus are not always on the same page: “On the more specific points, I am not sure our research has arrived at exactly the same nuances - specific ratios of raw vs. cooked vegan foods, for example.”\footnote{Dr. T. Colin Campbell, “Forewords” in \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}, by George Malkmus, (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers Inc., 2006), 24.} However, Campbell and Malkmus have enough in common to work together. Campbell explains, “I agree that a diet that emphasizes a trend toward raw foods is in the right direction.”\footnote{Campbell, “Forewords,” 24.} I include all of this because it further complicates the black and white approach others have assumed creates tension within the Hallelujah Diet. In reality, even the approved medical professionals have points of disagreement with Malkmus but they have found a way to work together. The point of different is the addition of the higher source that Malkmus mentioned above. For Campbell, only the science is necessary and his job is to recommend a vegan diet because he has proven that it is better for human beings. For Malkmus, his job is to look at the evidence offered by Campbell and others, and then review the evidence offered by God in Genesis to decide what it is that humans should eat.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Malkmus, \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}, 119.}
\item \footnote{Dr. T. Colin Campbell, “Forewords” in \textit{The Hallelujah Diet}, by George Malkmus, (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers Inc., 2006), 24.}
\item \footnote{Campbell, “Forewords,” 24.}
\end{itemize}
3.8.3 The Biblical Difference

It is also not as simple as it would appear to say that the biblical text is universally authoritative within the Hallelujah Diet. The diet is based on one verse from Genesis, but a few chapters later God instructs Noah that he may eat the meat of clean animals. So, even with the biblical evidence, Malkmus weighs his higher source material with what he found to be true in practice when he cured his own health ailments.

Malkmus informs his reader that he has a very practical reason for looking to the bible for nutrition advice.

The Bible is a complete guide for life. It not only deals with the spiritual; it also deals with the physical. But most people look to the Bible as only a spiritual book, and then look to the medical world for the answers to physical ills. My friends, we are suffering terribly because we are not taking into account God’s intelligent design for perfect health.121

The “intelligent design” aspect of this quote is key to understanding why Malkmus chooses to base his diet on Genesis 1:29. It is the diet that the humans originally created by God were meant to follow. Malkmus explained, “In Genesis 1:29, God told Adam that these fruits, vegetables, seeds, and nuts, in the garden, that He had previously created, were to be Adam’s food. Who would know better what Adam’s physical body had been designed to be nourished with, than the very Creator of that physical body?”122

Malkmus further supports the idea that the Genesis 1:29 diet is the best diet for humans by offering an explanation of what happened after humans turned away from

121 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 89.
122 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 49.
that diet. Malkmus argued that humans followed this “pure raw vegan diet” for 1,700 years, from creation to the flood, and that during those years humans lived to an average age of 912, “without a single recorded instance of sickness.”123 Malkmus continued with his analysis of the post-flood situation, “Within ten generations, the average lifespan of 912 years on the pure Genesis 1:29 diet before the flood, fell to 110 years on a cooked, meat-based diet after the flood.”124 This explanation resonated with the participants at the retreat center. When asked why he started to follow the Hallelujah Diet twenty years ago, Mike said “It’s just that it made sense. It really did. I mean it’s that simple. You go to Genesis 1:29 and it’s very simply and plainly stated in a few words what God intended us to eat.”125 Kendall echoed Mike’s explanation. “It’s Biblical, so it’s God’s instruction to us, so I know it’s true and right and I know it will work if you do it.”126 Cathy mentioned that she thinks about the place in the Bible “where God talks about how we’re supposed to treat our bodies like a temple and we’re not supposed – it’s almost like a sin if we mistreat ourselves.”127 For the participants, the Biblical support for the diet was important. They chose to come to the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat for health reasons, but they were also convinced that this diet would work and help them fight or prevent disease because it was right there in the bible. The biblical difference

123 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 52.
124 Malkmus, The Hallelujah Diet, 52.
125 Mike.
126 Kendall.
127 Cathy.
brings many people to the Hallelujah Diet, but they do not all adhere to the same interpretation of the rest of the bible, which presents another set of issues for the retreat center.

3.9 “You don’t have to be a Christian to be a vegan.”

There were nine participants and three leaders at the health retreat I attended. Of those twelve people, only nine identified as Christians. Tim and Anita both identify as Messianic Jews, and I identify as a Reform Jew. When a full quarter of the people present, including the two people in charge of running the retreat, do not identify as Christian, the Christian character of the retreat becomes a fascinating site for complicating what the Hallelujah Diet was set up to do, and what it is actually doing on the ground. The fact that this diet is based on Genesis brings up interesting issues for the health retreat center. Genesis is a text that belongs to every type of Christian and Jews as well. There are a myriad of ways to interpret its meaning and endless theological issues that are raised when Genesis is discussed in mixed company. The Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat at Lake Lure has become an interesting religious space because of these issues.

There is nothing in the diet itself that prevents non-Christians from participating. Tim asserted that this diet is important for Christians and for all people. “Even George, the founder of Hallelujah Acres, says that you can be an atheist and still heal yourself on

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128 Tim Koch.
129 The other Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat is run by Christians.
the Hallelujah Diet, because it has nothing to do with your belief system. It has to do with how you’re nourishing your body.”¹³⁰ In other words, the diet has the ability to stand alone. You don’t need to read the bible literally to eat raw vegan food. You don’t have to believe that this was the original diet intended for humanity to decide it is the best diet for your own body. Anita, who was raised as a secular Jew and became a Christian as part of the World Wide Church of God and then later became a Messianic Jew,¹³¹ talked to me about how her Judaism has worked in the retreat setting. Anita was excited that the retreat offered her an opportunity to teach Christians about her messianic faith.

We got a sense of why God sent us here. I mean, he gave us a lot of signs for it. I’m a Jew, and Jews like signs. We saw after about a month or two, or a couple of months, maybe six months, with the people that came here, almost all of them were Christian. Passionate. Most of them were passionate Christians. But a number of them had absolutely zero idea of the importance of Israel in God’s plan. And we really pretty quickly that that’s probably why we were sent here, because we would be able to start a discussion about that, especially with certain individuals that we members of churches that today are called replacement theology churches. People, Christians who thought Israel was done away with, they muffed it, it’s up to individual Jews. Which is totally not what we believe.¹³²

For Anita, teaching people about the Hallelujah Diet offered an exciting opportunity to teach them about Jews, so she started teaching people what she believes. She was careful

¹³⁰ Tim Koch.
¹³¹ Anita Koch.
about it and says she avoided proselytizing.\textsuperscript{133} Anita explained, “Since the program was already in operation, and devotions were a part of it, it gave us a floor for being able to do that in a gentle way.” Anita and Tim’s messianic faith came up most often during the daily devotions. They often offered facts about the Jews who lived at the time of Yeshua (Jesus) or about Judaism in general to complement the biblical texts we were reading and discussing. Anita used Hebrew words and explained their meaning often to give the participants a sense of the texts as they would have been read in their original language.\textsuperscript{134} Anita explained that for the most part, this gentle introduction of Jewish concepts and ideas has worked well but there have been a few challenges along the way.

There have been participants who had a problem with her Messianic Judaism and others have taken issue with some of the theological ideas expressed at the retreat center. Anita remembered a mother and daughter who came from “a very legalistic church” that ended up leaving the retreat on Tuesday because someone had suggested that animals have souls.\textsuperscript{135} Tim told me that George Malkmus has also faced challenges with spreading the word about the Hallelujah Diet to Christians.

What happened is he was ostracized by his peers, despite his reputation as a great pastor. He’s from the Baptist church. He was, as pastors go, he was very successful in his church, and was doing quite well until his diagnosis of cancer. Then he changed his diet, healed himself of cancer, and he tried to tell his peers that this is how he did it and it’s based in

\textsuperscript{133} The two Messianic books that Anita gave me to take home and think about call this claim into question. But, I recognize that my situation may be a unique case given my identity as both a Jew and as someone interested in religion.
\textsuperscript{134} Participant observation at Morning Devotions, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 21-26, 2015.
\textsuperscript{135} Anita Koch.
the Bible. And it’s something that they should tell their parishioners so they could avoid serious health issues. For that, he was ostracized, and they – of course, one of the arguments was, that’s a bunch of New Age thinking, and it doesn’t belong in the church. Another issue was other scriptures that seem to indicate that you can eat whatever you want. And so the theological arguing begins.\textsuperscript{136}

Tim describes the challenges that Malkmus faced as he worked to spread the Hallelujah Diet. People objected to the perception that this diet was “New Age” and they were not convinced by its Biblical foundation. Tim also explained that these challenges persist despite the success of the diet. Tim noted that “there seems to be a good bit of resistance within the Christian church.”\textsuperscript{137} He thought this might be due to the tendency of many churches to focus on the avoidance of sin as the most important aspect of Christianity. He told me that the diet is not a sin issue, it is a health issue. In his words, “You’re not going to burn in hell if you eat meat.”\textsuperscript{138} Tim thought that this was the piece the churches were missing, “The church looks at it solely as a spiritual matter and ignores the physical aspect.”\textsuperscript{139}

For Christians who are concerned more with the next life than their current one, the Hallelujah Diet is not a priority. Interestingly, the issue of sin did come up in interviews. As I mentioned, some of the participants actually did frame the diet in terms of sin, and spoke to me about the damage they were doing to their God-given temples.\textsuperscript{140}

So, it seems that people are interpreting the diet in terms that work for them. The retreat

\textsuperscript{136} Tim Koch, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 25, 2015.
\textsuperscript{137} Tim Koch.
\textsuperscript{138} Tim Koch.
\textsuperscript{139} Tim Koch.
\textsuperscript{140} Interviews with Erica and Cathy.
center is set up to allow people to get what they want and what they need. We were offered a lot of information, we read many biblical texts, and learned numerous new kitchen skills, and we were encouraged to take it all home and figure out what will work best for us.

Annie Blazer’s interpretation of the Hallelujah Diet relied on her interpretation that the Hallelujah Diet mirrored Evangelical Christianity in its insistence that “one cannot live as a Christian and as a worldly person at the same time.”\textsuperscript{141} I found this assertion to be completely misrepresentative of my experience at the retreat center. Throughout the week conversation about worldly matters pervaded our daily lives. People talked about their issues at work, their problems with the US government, the books they were reading and the baseball teams they root for. On Wednesday, we piled into the Hallelujah Acres bus and headed down to Lake Lure for a pontoon tour of the lake. For a few hours, we marveled at the mansions that dot the shore and the mountains that frame the scene. Almost everyone in the group took a photo when our boat passed by the site where the film *Dirty Dancing* was filmed. Both the book and our conversations at the retreat included lengthy discussions about what we could eat if we were traveling, or eating out with friends, or going to dinner at someone’s house. It was never suggested that to follow the diet, we would have to separate ourselves from the

\textsuperscript{141} Blazer, “Hallelujah Acres,” 74.
world. The diet also didn’t come with the moral superiority that Blazer identified. In fact, we were discouraged from walking around trumpeting the superiority of the diet. The diet is promoted as the best option for humans, but in terms of taking the diet into the world, Tim and Anita suggested that we quietly live the diet, improve our health, and tell people about it when they ask what we’ve been doing. Tim and Anita both expressed their wish that more people, whatever they believe or don’t believe, would come to their retreat center and learn about the diet. Tim told me that “you have to take responsibility for what you put in your mouth, whether you’re a Christian or non-Christian.”\textsuperscript{142} The fact that it is a Christian diet based on the bible is important, but it is not essential for followers of the diet to adhere to Christianity or any religion at all. The Hallelujah Diet is one way to take charge of what you eat and take control of your health.

\textbf{3.10 Conclusion}

On Wednesday during our week at the Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center, a miracle occurred during our morning walk. We walked every morning at the center. Prior to Wednesday, we had split up into two groups. The five “single ladies” - Danni, Kendall, Erica, Cathy, and I - would walk together and do the entire loop - about a mile. The loop involved some hills and the heat was already fairly intense on those June mornings. On Wednesday, we had finally persuaded Tim and Anita to switch the times of our

\textsuperscript{142} Tim Koch, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 25, 2015.
devotion and the walk so that we could walk when it was (slightly) cooler. So, that
morning, “the couples” - Lori and Calvin and Mike and Faith, joined us at the start of
our walk with the intention of turning around a little ways up the road and heading
back. Instead, Lori and Calvin stayed with us for the whole walk. We took a break about
halfway, because Danni had brought containers from the kitchen so we could collect the
wild blackberries that lined the path. After the break, we checked with Calvin to make
sure he was doing ok. He was excited and said he could make it. We had already
completed the uphill portion of the walk, so he was sure he could finish. And finish he
did! Calvin referred to this walk as a miracle from that point forward. He had been in
physical therapy after his stents were put in, and he hadn’t progressed very far. He told
me he could only walk on the treadmill for about ten minutes and that when he tried out
the small track inside the building there, they told him to walk around three times and
he barely made it twice around.143 This walk was a turning point for Calvin and for the
rest of us. When I interviewed Calvin later that day, he was still glowing when he
smiled and said, “I am delighted to see the results so far.”144 The walk also encouraged
Lori:

And I really – I’m not afraid, even though I realize I’m facing a death threatening disease.
But I know I’m in the Lord’s hands. I’m just so overjoyed with what He has already done
for Calvin. I know it’s a miracle, what’s took place with him. I expect a miracle in my life,
too.145

143 Calvin.
144 Calvin, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
145 Lori, Interview with author, Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat, June 24, 2015.
Lori and Calvin planned to go home and follow the diet and they did so with the understanding that their lives were in God’s hands and the expectation that miracles were not only possible, but probable.

Upon returning home, the communication between participants switched to email. We got a few reports of progress. Mike and Faith were sticking to the diet despite a refrigerator failure that claimed a fair amount of their stored produce. Erica reported weight loss, the lifting of her “brain fog” and some extra energy. The diet seemed to be working for people. They were sticking to it and feeling better. The success of the diet seems to lie in the pieces the other authors missed. If the Hallelujah Diet truly represented a complete commitment, Mike and Faith may have quit the day they lost their produce. Instead, they improvised for a few days and ate some more cooked food than planned while they worked on restocking. In research, I found that the diet has become large enough to enable for flexibility and diversity within its framework. The Hallelujah Diet Retreat Center, in particular, has become a space where religions, food studies, science, medicine and alternative remedies are all entangled together. Although the mix of religions and the sheer amount of evidence available has changed, this is not that different from Sylvester Graham’s diet in the nineteenth century. He proposed the diet, and the Grahamites, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Kelloggs all adopted

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146 Mike, Email Correspondence, July 4, 2015.
147 Erica, Email Correspondence, July 27, 2015.
aspects of his diet and made it their own. Christian diets are written as prescriptive, but in the lived reality of their practice, there is room for individuals and groups to make the diet their own. This vast array of authoritative sources enables people to make the Hallelujah Diet their own. The Christian Hallelujah Diet has the potential to provide inspiration, evidence, and a basic framework to become the diet of any humans willing to eat raw vegan food. As Tim proclaimed, “you don’t have to be a Christian to be a vegan.”

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” (III John 2 KJV)

4.1 Introduction

I arrived at Baldwin Family Farms on a chilly June morning as an unannounced visitor. After a few emails and phone calls I decided to drive the hour or so from Durham to Yanceyville, North Carolina, to check out the on-site store and see if I could talk to someone about coming back for a more formal visit. It was drizzling when I got out of the car. The sign at the On-Farm Beef Outlet was lit up, but no one was around. There was a list of phone numbers on the door for the office, V. Mac Baldwin, and Peggy Baldwin. I called the office to see if someone was around. A woman picked up and I asked if anyone was available. She said someone would be right out. V. Mac emerged from the house a few minutes later. He never introduced himself but I recognized him from the Baldwin Grass Fed Beef website. I explained that I was a graduate student interested in talking to him about the farm, food, and religion. He opened up the store and we headed inside. The V in V. Mac stands for Von. The Mac for MacLloyd. He shortened it to V. Mac because he found it was easier for people to remember and explained that this is especially important when you’re in the direct marketing business, which he is. V. Mac quickly showed me around the store. There were two large
refrigerator cases of meat displayed at the front. In the back of the store, there is a large storage room. On a side table near the entrance there were informational brochures about Baldwin Beef. The walls were decorated with newspaper articles about the farm, the Whole Foods marketing poster about V. Mac and information about the beef’s many certifications. As V. Mac began explaining his beef business, we were interrupted frequently. I took notes by hand, scribbling down everything V. Mac said as quickly as possible. He stopped often to clarify or to make sure I had written down correctly what he had said.  

V. Mac started by telling me that he is a Gideon. V. Mac belongs to The Gideons Internation, “an Association of Christian business and professional men and their wives dedicated to telling people about Jesus through sharing personally and by providing Bibles and New Testaments.” V. Mac talked to me often about the value and transformative power of scripture. He told stories of sharing the Word with customers and colleagues he met through his business and he cited Bible verses often as we chatted. As we sat chatting that first day, V. Mac’s phone also interrupted us a number of times. When a call came into his cell phone, it did not ring, it mooed. After about an hour of talking with brief interludes of mooing phone calls, two of V. Mac’s grandchildren came in from Bible camp. His granddaughter was dressed similarly to her grandfather - they both wore jeans, cowboy boots and straw cowboy hats. However, his

1 I hadn’t expected to meet V. Mac that day, never mind engage him in an hour-long conversation, so I didn’t have my tape recorder with me. Lesson learned.

granddaughter’s boots were pink and, as she proudly pointed out to me, her red t-shirt bore the Baldwin farms logo. Direct marketing, the Bible, cows, and family. These elements recurred throughout my conversations with V. Mac in the visits that followed.³

At Baldwin Family Farms they raise grass-fed Charolais beef cattle. Charolais is a French breed. V. Mac explained, “they’re white, they’re lean, and they’re excellent grazers.”⁴ Their coloring allows them to breed, graze, and thrive during hot North Carolina summers. V. Mac didn’t intend to go into the cattle business. He bought his first calf when he was ten and dreamed of raising cattle, but then he joined the Navy and afterward went to school, earning degrees in electrical engineering. He worked as an engineer but began to recall his passion for cattle. In 1969, he bought a couple of heifers. V. Mac recalled those early years and told me that he had to learn quickly about the resources available to farmers in North Carolina. One of those resources was the cooperative extension, which are remote locations run by North Carolina State University. The cooperative extensions are located remotely in each county. V. Mac remembered leaning on the experts at his local cooperative extension quite a bit during the first twelve years. By 1981, V. Mac had thirty-five “real good Charolais mama cows” and his young son, who loved working with the cows, was getting antsy. V. Mac laughed as he recounted his son’s urgent plea, “Dad, let’s go, let’s go, let’s go.”⁵ They

³ Participant Observation, Baldwin Family Farms, June 4, 2015.
⁴ V. Mac Baldwin, Interview with author, Baldwin Family Farms, December 10, 2015.
⁵ V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
bought the 331-acre farm they currently own and operate that year. They expanded the farm gradually and now own over 800 acres in Yanceyville, with an additional 2,000 acres of leased pastures in other parts of North Carolina and Virginia. The Baldwins initially sold their meat through other companies. They began direct marketing their beef in 2002 under the Baldwin Charolais beef label. The On-Farm Beef Outlet opened in 2003. The Baldwin Family Farms mission statement is “to produce chemical-free, all-natural grass-fed lean beef with superior health benefits, quality and flavor utilizing old-fashioned, sustainable techniques — Our farm to your family.” The elements of this complex mission statement will be discussed detail in this chapter.

This chapter describes a religious food reform project that is entangled in the economic, regulatory, and technological realities of the food system in the United States. Meat production requires that V. Mac engage with secular government agencies as he strives to entice secular consumers and supermarket chains. V. Mac works hard to please his customers and his Christianity plays a vital role in that process. V. Mac sees in his meat missionary potential. It allows him to connect with customers who have not accepted Jesus and brings him into regular contact with his Muslim processor, Abdul Chaudhry. Participating in the meat industry and selling his product widely pushes V. Mac outside the protective world of religious idealists working to improve the world. V.

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6 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
Mac’s Christianity is free range when he raises his cows in accordance with his beliefs and values, but it is redirected when he meets Christians, non-Christians, and non-believers in the public sphere where he processes and sells his meat. V. Mac’s Christianity provides a locus for the exploration of the encounter between religious food reformers and the secular alternative food industry. I argue that the transition from V. Mac’s overt Christianity on the farm to the secularized marketing materials and packaging used to sell the meat exemplify a tension between religious food reformers and the consumers who support the alternative food industry.

V. Mac informed me that three issues drive his business: (1) people do not trust the USDA; (2) people can use the internet to do their own research about meat and when housewives do the research, they end up wanting to eat grass-fed beef; and (3) people are concerned about animal welfare—did the animal have an enjoyable life? Was the animal harvested in a way that did not cause it to suffer? This chapter will describe these three issues in detail as they are enacted at Baldwin Family Farms. First, I offer an analysis of the intricate system that V. Mac has created to raise his cattle and the ever-increasing number of government and independent certifications that he requires to do so. The relationship between humans, cows, and chickens on the farm is a focal point of this chapter. The demands of the consumer will be considered at each stage of the process from calf to sirloin steak. Alongside analysis of the three issues that drive V.

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8 V. Mac Baldwin, Interview with author, Baldwin Family Farms, June 4, 2016.
Mac’s business, V. Mac’s personal motivations will be considered. These include his convictions about protecting agricultural land, his belief that God created systems that work and humans should work with them instead of against them, and his mission to spread the good news of Jesus to everyone he encounters. Religion complicates and defines this entire operation. Most of the Baldwin beef is processed at a halal facility and sold at secular grocery stories (Whole Foods and Kroger). This chapter begins with a discussion of Christian approaches to animal welfare and an overview of how V. Mac’s identity as a Gideon influenced his ideals about animal welfare and environmental protection. The second section highlights the issues V. Mac views as central to his success as they relate to his work on the farm including tensions with the USDA and alternate certification processes, the time and resource intensive grass-fed beef system and the health benefits associated with it, and animal welfare on the farm and at the processing plant. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the role of consumers in alternate food systems like Baldwin Grass Fed Beef.⁹

When I asked V. Mac about the relationships he has forged with a Muslim processor, secular markets and grocery stores, and his Christian and non-Christian customers he told me that food systems are all entangled like this. He continued to explain that everyone gets mixed up with different people in the process. Entangled

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⁹ This chapter utilizes interviews with V. Mac Baldwin. He has 17 staff members and many of his family members are involved in the business, but as the spokesperson for both the farm and the family, he ended up being my only interlocutor on site. So, this chapter will proceed with data closer to an oral history than ethnography.
indeed. V. Mac’s livelihood depends on his customers, so he is not always able to use his meat to minister to customers as he would like. He has also faced harsh criticism for his partnerships with non-Christians. However, V. Mac has not been deterred. On my second visit to the farm, V. Mac explained a recent complication on the farm and he asked me to recite Matthew 11:28-30 for him because those are the verses that get him through difficult days on the farm. He was disappointed to learn that I did not know these verses off the top of my head. He said these verses ground him on hard days and help him in every aspect of his work on the farm: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” 10 Through every tough decision V. Mac makes on the farm and for his business, he finds comfort in the knowledge that he shares the burden with Jesus.

4.2 A Pastoralist Ethic on the Farm

According to Christian tradition, humans were granted permission to consume meat in the ninth chapter of Genesis after the great flood that wiped out all humans and animals except for Noah, his family, and all the pairs of animals he fit on his ark. This is often interpreted as a concession meant to alleviate some of the violent tendencies of humanity. As a result, the consumption of meat has a complicated history in Christianity. In “Practicing the Presence of God: A Christian Approach to Animals” Jay

10 Mt. 11:28-30 KJV
McDaniel divides Christian approaches to animal welfare into what he calls “The Negative Traditions” and “The Positive Traditions.” He argues that the negative traditions have contributed to the dominant approach to animals in Christianity. He lists five teachings that scholars have pointed to, which he notes have contributed to a prejudicial approach to animals: (1) animals were put on earth for humans, (2) some animals are unclean, (3) some animals are meant to be sacrificed for rituals, (4) animals are slaves to human needs, and (5) animals have no rational mind, soul, or sentience. McDaniel and other scholars including Andrew Linzey and David Clough have pointed to these themes as they recur throughout the history of Christian theology, including the works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. McDaniel uses this example from Aquinas: “There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect are for the perfect...It is not unlawful if man uses plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man as the Philosopher [Aristotle] states.” This quote, which offers Aquinas citing Aristotle, exemplifies this strain of thought within Christianity. God created plants, humans, and animals so that

11 “The Positive Traditions” focus on examples of animal welfare in the Bible and human diets before the flood. This was discussed in chapter three as it has a tendency to lead to vegetarianism.
14 McDaniel, “Practicing the Presence of God,” 137.
each serves each other in perfect order. Animals exist for the good of man. McDaniel argues that this has led to system in which animals are treated as machines. He continues to note that this tendency was “intensified by consumerist habits,” which often “reduce all living beings - plants as well as animals - into commodities for exchange in the marketplace [sic].”¹⁵ In the early twenty-first century, animals are treated as commodities. This is not necessarily a problem. Animals have been considered an economic commodity for centuries. The ethical issues that have arisen with regard to animals as commodities often relate to their treatment in the American meat industry.¹⁶

The meat industry relies heavily on the fifth point that McDaniel pointed to as a contributing factor within the negative tradition: the belief that animals lack such fundamental qualities as language and morals that separate them from humans. The question of animal sentience and souls has both created and reinforced a human/animal binary that plays a central role in animal welfare conversations. Many scholars have argued that religion bears the brunt of the blame for the endurance of this binary. In Animal Liberation Peter Singer argues that the attitudes of westerners towards animals have roots in Judaism in Greek antiquity. He explains that these two separate roots came together in Christianity and through Christianity, came to prevail in Europe and the

¹⁵ McDaniel, “Practicing the Presence of God,” 137.
¹⁶ Other industries such as cosmetics and pharmaceuticals are also cited often as modern systems wherein animals are treated as mere commodities.
West. Singer suggests that Jewish tradition put forward to the idea of the uniqueness of the human species, but that Christianity put a greater emphasis on this concept when it was combined this with a conception of an immortal soul. In the seventeenth century, René Descartes echoes this Christian configuration when he described his findings after observing the motions of animals, noting that animal movement could originate from basic mechanics and that the presence of a thinking soul could not be proven. For centuries, the idea that animals lacked souls and were thus inferior to humans was inherent in science, philosophy, and theology. Darwin attempted to push against this perception in the nineteenth century by placing humans alongside non-human animals in his theory of evolution. He implicated religion in the process.

The belief in God has often been advanced as not only the greatest, but the most complete of all the distinctions between man and lower animals. It is however impossible, as we have seen, to maintain that this belief is innate or instinctive in man.

Darwin argues here for the social construction of this dichotomy in his attempt to break it down. Despite periodic attempts to remind humans of their place among the non-human animals, the human/animal binary perseveres. Foodways have mainly served to reinforce this dichotomy between humans and animals, especially in the contemporary United States. Singer proposes that contemporary Americans experience “the most

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direct form of contact with non-human animals is at mealtime,” when he concludes, “we eat them.”

Humans, already engulfed in a centuries old tradition of reveling in their uniqueness as a species, are unlikely to identify with non-human animals when their main interaction with them involves a knife and fork. Given this history that serves to strengthen the binary, rather than eliminate it, it is not surprising that many non-human animals today are treated as commodities instead of living beings.

The human/animal binary enables a level of detachment from non-human animals that has proven to be detrimental to domesticated cattle, pigs, chickens and turkeys in the United States. Many non-human animals are regarded as meat-in-process. This dissociation has enabled the meat industry to implement massive operations for raising and killing animals. David Kirby, author of Animal Factory, explains that the United States government and the meat industry call these compounds “confined [or concentrated] animal feeding operations” or CAFOs. Kirby also points out that most people know these operations as “factory farms.”

Interestingly, Baldwin Family Farms may eventually provide an interesting case study for how the USDA and others think about CAFOs. “Any feeding operation with more than one thousand ‘animal units’ (one beef cattle equals one animal unit) is automatically designated as a CAFO.”

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21 Singer, Animal Liberation, 95.
24 Kirby, Animal Factory, 32.
Baldwins currently have about 750 mama cows and they’re moving towards 1000. Will their farm of rolling, grassy hills be considered a factory farm if they reach 1000 cows? This question points to some of the gray areas that sit at the center of debates about the meat industry. In many forums, language about the CAFOs is much less clinical. In *Eating Animals* Jonathan Safran Foer describes factory farming differently: “We have waged war, or rather let a war be waged, against all of the animals we eat. This war is new and has a name: factory farming.” Whether it is framed as a war or a technological innovation, factory farming dominates the meat industry in the United States. Kirby explains that “two percent of U.S. livestock facilities now raise 40 percent of all animals, and the vast majority of pigs, chickens, and dairy cows are produced inside animal factories.” Conversely, a USDA report from 2013 notes that beef from alternative production systems including natural, organic, and grass/forage-fed accounts for only 3% of the U.S. Beef market. However, the report continues to point out that these alternative production systems “have grown about 20 percent in recent years.” Baldwin Family Farms is part of this growing alternative system.

V. Mac didn’t set out to oppose factory farming when he bought his first heifers in 1969. He actually never articulated an opposition to that system during our

\[25\] V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
\[29\] Mathews and Johnson, “Alternative Beef Production Systems,” 2.
conversations. Instead, he frames the work he does in relation to his beliefs on the role of humans in the world.

We’re reminded daily when we look out on the pastures of the scripture where the Lord says he owns the cattle of a thousand hills and that’s our belief – that he is the Creator and we’re here for a season and we’re to be a steward of the time and the land that God has given us and we are to leave it better than when we found it and that we are to be in a spirit of praise and adoration for the Lord.30

V. Mac carries with him a deep concern for being a good steward of the land and his animals. McDaniel points to the eco-justice perspective that has recently taken root in Christianity. He relies on Dieter Hessel’s work to lay out for basic principles of Christian eco-justice: (1) solidarity with other peoples and creatures, (2) ecological sustainability, (3) sufficiency as a standard for organized sharing, and (4) working for the good of the commons.31 V. Mac did not mention concerns related to sufficiency or hunger when we spoke, but the other three principles came through clearly in every conversation we had.

V. Mac sees himself as part of creation, not as a human with dominion over creation.

During one of our conversations he reflected on his dependence on the rest of creation.

Well, being close to God’s creation, we depend on rain, we depend on sunshine, we depend on good health to be able to do what we do physically, we’re entirely dependent on God in our life because the resources that we have our his providence in our life. So that makes this the only way to be able to live.”32

V. Mac is articulating a deep solidarity with his grass and his cows here. They all depend on God and God’s rain, sun, and good fortune. In terms of the second principle,

31 McDaniel, “Practicing the Presence of God,” 141.
V. Mac has gone to great lengths to encourage ecological sustainability in Caswell County and in North Carolina. He is working with the NC Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to register his land as Farmland in perpetuity. This will ensure that the land he has worked so hard to restore will remain farmland forever. He explained his motivation to participate in this program.

The Lord loves grass. If you look at the Creation, it was very early in the Creation that He created grass. And we’re losing grass, we’re losing land that can be grassland, in North Carolina to the tune of 400 acres a day. You know, the Midwestern ranges we’re losing those. So everything is shrinking. The grasslands are shrinking. The rest of my years here on earth, I’m devoted to making more grassland. And to having it available for my family, my children, my grandchildren, my great grandchildren.

V. Mac and his staff put in countless hours to restore land that had been destroyed after years of tobacco farming. They are doing everything they can to create and retain the grassland that V. Mac believes God loves. This relates to the fourth principle of eco-justice - working for the good of the commons. V. Mac strives to provide his customers with a superior product and leave the land in good shape for the future generations. He does this by leaving portions of his land alone so wildlife systems remain intact and waterways are left untouched. According to the Baldwin website, “Ponds and streams are fenced to exclude cattle entry. Habitat and woodlands breaks are managed and protected to encourage wildlife.”

It was easy to see that this was true as I toured the farm with V. Mac. Grassy fields are bordered by forests, ponds, lakes, and streams.

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The question of how V. Mac arrived at these principles without seeking out eco-justice or environmentalism is a complicated one. After spending time with V. Mac and talking with him, I came to the conclusion that being a Gideon led him to what McDaniel refers to as a “pastoralist ethic.” McDaniel described the pastoralist ethic of the Bible in relation to animals. He argues that it allows animals to be used to certain purposes as long as certain conventions were observed and that this ethic attaches high value to diligent care of animals. McDaniel sees this ethic as one that is evidenced in the Bible and those who adhere to it cite passages from the bible related to the proper treatment and care of animals. A similar exercise could be done to locate the pastoralist ethic related to how people should treat the land. McDaniel laments the fact that this pastoralist ethic “has been largely ignored by most of the philosophers and social critics who have contributed to modern animal ethics.” He suggests that a return to this pastoralist ethic could provide “an alternative philosophy that would give practical guidance on farm animal welfare.” In V. Mac’s case, this pastoralist ethic did just that. V. Mac is a Gideon, and in my conversations with him, he turns frequently to scripture for answers. When he began raising his cows he looked the Bible and found that God loves grass and that within creation there is a system for raising animals that leads to

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34 Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Chapters 2 and 5 of this dissertation.
36 Fraser, “Caring for Farm Animals: Pastoralist Ideals in an Industrialized World,” 554.
better treatment of the land and has benefits for human health. V. Mac adopted a pastoralist ethic, without referring to it as such, because that is the ethic that he found in scripture. So V. Mac is concerned about what his customers want, but it turns out that what they want is beef from animals that were treated well and fed their intended diet of grass and produce. The “consumerist habits” that McDaniel worries are causing the commodification of plants and animals seems to have the opposite effect in the alternative market. The alternative systems that have developed work against this tendency and strive to treat plants, animals, and the land better. V. Mac strives to produce the best product for his customers and this works with, instead of against, his drive to be a good steward of both the land and animals and leave his property in better shape than he found it in.

4.3 Certifications and the USDA

Whole Foods committed to providing full GMO transparency to its customers by 2018.\textsuperscript{37} As a supplier of Whole Foods, V. Mac needs to label his beef non-GMO. He had already lost business because of this. A Whole Foods in Virginia had recently stopped carrying Baldwin Beef in favor of another farm that is already non-GMO certified so they could compete with the Publix across the street from their store. V. Mac stressed that he did not want to lose any more stores, so he is trying to get certified as soon as

possible. The beef is already GMO free but it is not certified non-GMO. This has created a problem for V. Mac. He has spoken with a few different non-GMO certifiers to get his beef certified but there are high costs associated with this certification.38 During a visit six months after our first conversation about the non-GMO certification, V. Mac was still looking for an agency that would be an affordable option.

The non-GMO certification speaks to the increasing need for certifications in the alternative food system. V. Mac identified a lack of trust in the USDA as one of the issues that drives his alternative beef business. The addition of certifications beyond the basic USDA requirements exemplify this consumer desire for more information about their food and an interest in certifiers beyond the USDA. V. Mac has dealt with various decisions related to certifications and frequently finds himself explaining his certifications or lack of certifications to his customers. Baldwin Beef goes out with two different labels because it is processed in two different plants. The beef that is processed at Chaudhry bears a simple black and white label. Large print marks the beef as “Baldwin Charolais Beef, Grass-Fed, All-Natural.” Smaller text proclaims that the meal is Halal. This beef is sold in Whole Foods stores where it is often displayed in cases with Whole Foods labeling.

38 When I visited on June 4, 2015, V. Mac had just been audited by one certification agency and they determined that it would cost him $1650 for the certification.
The beef that comes out of the Piedmont plant is more intricate. On the front label the Baldwin logo is in color (blue and red) and the back label has two stamps that read “Got to be NC Beef” and “Animal Welfare Approved.” There is also a blurb about Baldwin Family Farms related to their animals welfare practices and the better tasting meat that results from their attention to animal welfare. This beef is sold at Kroger stores.

There is a stamp at the bottom of the Chaudhry label with a USDA number. The calls on June 4 that weren’t about the non-GMO certification were about that USDA number. All of the Baldwin’s certifications at that point were through Chaudhry Halal Meat Co. Inc. A USDA inspector at the Piedmont plant that processes the rest of the Baldwin Beef recently noticed that V. Mac does not have certification through them. He stopped processed Baldwin Beef because they are “non-compliant and processing
cannot go forward until he is certified though the USDA to use Piedmont.”

V. Mac had to pursue certification through the USDA to use this second plant. To be clear, both plants are certified independently to operate through the USDA. But V. Mac also needs an independent certification through the USDA to send his beef to the plants. The USDA has created a system of regulations and certifications that is difficult to navigate and means very little to consumers. In addition, the actual effectiveness of these certifications has been called into question repeatedly. During all of my visits with V. Mac, certification came up in conversation. Certifications have become a major part of the administrative tasks that occupy V. Mac’s time.

The Baldwin Grass Fed Beef Website clarifies the certifications and labels they use and don’t use to market their beef. They use the phrase “all natural” and explain that when they mean when they use this label.

It means we have it means we have attempted to do everything according to the laws of nature. We don’t use pesticides or chemical fertilizers on our pastures because we want our grass to grow chemical free. We also do not use any hormones (most of which are estrogen-based) or antibiotics on our steers. Should any steers get sick and are require treatment to recover, they are removed from our direct marketing program.

“All natural” requires explanation because it is used on so many products with varying meanings. The Baldwins define the term to mean their approach to growing grass and

steers in particular. Subsumed under “all natural” is their additional dedication to animals that are “antibiotic free” and “hormone free.” Antibiotics are use prophylactically in the CAFOs due to the crowded living conditions that animals are subjected to in those spaces. When Baldwin Beef is claiming they are antibiotic free, they are positioning themselves against the factory farms. When cows have room to move around and sick cows are removed from the herd and placed in separate areas, antibiotics are not necessary. “Hormone free” is a similar situation. Hormones are used in CAFOs to increase growth in cattle. Baldwin cattle do not grow particularly fast - it takes them 8-10 months longer to reach slaughter weight than a CAFO steer. It takes them much longer to reach slaughter weight than the cattle at CAFOs, but this is a factor that V. Mac considers part of the equation when raising cattle. There are concerns in the cases of both antibiotics and hormones that humans who eat meat from animals treated with antibiotics and hormones are ingesting them as well, which may affect human health.

Baldwin Beef is not USDA certified organic, so they cannot label their beef organic. However, their meat is fed grass that has not been treated with chemicals. The issue here, as V. Mac sees it, is that you can feed cattle organic grains and obtain a USDA organic certification. V. Mac is not against organic certification, but he thinks his beef is superior to the beef that bears the USDA organic label. As it states on their website, “we
think our beef is beyond organic.”

USDA organic certification is handled through independent agencies and costs money. Given the broad range of beef that are encompassed within the certified organic label, V. Mac decided to forgo that certification and stress that his beef is “all natural,” which he believes includes the fact that the grass the steers eat is chemical free.

Finally, Baldwin Beef is “Animal Welfare Approved.” This certification does not cost V. Mac anything. All that is required are regular audits of the farm and the animals who live there. I asked V. Mac about this certification and he said that “people want to make sure that if they eat meat, the animal was raised well. People want animals to receive the best care.” He continued to explain that Whole Foods uses the Global Animal Partnership to stress its own dedication to animal welfare.

V. Mac has sought out certifications, rejected certifications, and been required to obtain certifications. Selling meat as part of the American meat industry and especially the alternative market within that industry requires dedication to learning the terminology and selecting the certifications that consumers are willing to trust, and identifying those that they do not. For consumers seeking meat that was raised in accordance with their own values, certifications beyond a USDA stamps are almost always required.

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42 “Beef FAQs.”
43 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
44 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
After my fist visit and impromptu interview, V. Mac and I decided to plan a visit when I could get a tour of the farm. Eventually, V. Mac decided it would be best if I came on a day when he had to collect soil samples around the farm. That way I could see the whole property and help him out. When I arrived a few days later, I found V. Mac in the On-Farm Beef Outlet. After he then finished up a project in the freezer, we grabbed a bucket, the boxes for the soil, and the soil sample probe. We said a quick hello to V. Mac’s wife, Peggy, and headed out in the ATV to the fields. We started in the closest field to the house, which had some mama cows in it and some baby calves that had been born in April and May. V. Mac collected soil samples from the ground using the soil sample probe and I broke up the soil in the bucket. When we had enough soil to fill the box, we would empty the bucket into the box. When I asked V. Mac why we were collecting soil, he told me that he needed to send it out as part of the process of being certified as sustainable in order to get the land designated as farmland in perpetuity. V. Mac explained that he would pay 25% of the initial fee, North Carolina will pay 25% and the federal government will pay 50% to keep the farmland farmland. He told me that he’s not really worried about the farm for the next few generations because it is going to his son and then hopefully to his grandsons, but he wasn’t sure what would happen
after that. He was concerned that without designating the land, it may end up condos someday.45

The land means everything to V. Mac. He more often identifies himself as a grass farmer than as a cattle farmer. V. Mac says he’s always been “nuts about grass” and that is why he decided to raise grass-fed cattle. He maintains that you have to be a grass expert to raise cattle.46 Luckily, V. Mac is a grass expert. He explained that most grass in North Carolina is Kentucky 31 Fescue grass. This is an annual grass that is only good for about three months. At Baldwin they use a combination of cereal rye grass in the winter and crabgrass in the summer. V. Mac told me that rye and crabgrass are not annual grasses so they don’t need to expend energy on their root systems. This means there is more sugar in the grass, so when the cattle eat it, their meat tastes better.47 V. Mac is adamant that grass-fed beef tastes better than grain fed beef, or even beef from cows that were grass-fed and grain-finished.48 The Baldwin Grass-Fed Beef website has an explanation for this. “Cattle are ruminants, and when they graze, their stomach/digestive system has a neutral pH balance. When feedlot steers are fed grains, their digestive system becomes acidic, which may cause liver problems in the animal.”49

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45 Participant Observation, Baldwin Family Farms, June 9, 2015.
46 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
47 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
48 This is an industry term for cattle that are grass-fed and possibly pasture-grazed but then feed on grain the last 90-160 days before slaughter.
As I mentioned above, it takes longer to raise cattle on grass. According to the Baldwin website, the 24 months it usually takes for their steers to reach finish weight of 1250-1300 pounds is about fifty percent slower than cattle raised on commercial feedlots.\textsuperscript{50}

However, the Baldwins consider this extra time worth it because of the improvement to the meat.

The meat is leaner, lower in saturated fat, and lower in calories (up to 100 calories less in a six-ounce serving). Beef from grass fed steers has about 50% of the saturated fat of that from grain-fed steers. Grain fed steers have a totally white fat. The fat in our grass fed steers is light orange colored due to the beta-carotene in the grass.\textsuperscript{51}

V. Mac often stressed the health benefits of his grass-fed beef. He didn’t mention the lower saturated fat or the beta-carotene in our conversations. When we talked about the beef, he stressed a different benefit. At one point I asked V. Mac if there were anything I should know that I wasn’t asking about. He responded, “well you’ve got the health angle, the Omega-3, that’s beautiful.”\textsuperscript{52} I asked him to tell me more about this. He told me that Peggy had cancer but she doesn’t have it any more. Part of what they learned when they started raising grass-fed cattle is that grass-fed beef is high in Omega-3s. V. Mac told me that Omega-3 is “an awesome antioxidant that fights radical cells in your body.”\textsuperscript{53} Cancer is a radical cell, so Omega-3s are important when “cancer is running

\textsuperscript{50} “About Our Beef.”
\textsuperscript{51} “About Our Beef.”
\textsuperscript{52} V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
\textsuperscript{53} V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
rampant.” V. Mac stressed that “we need His solution,” that is God’s solution, to fight cancer, and Omega-3s are one way to do that. The Baldwin Beef website contains additional promotional information about Omega-3 noting that they improve cholesterol by increasing the “good” HDL cholesterol and decreasing the “bad” LDL cholesterol. They also point out that Omega-3s are anti-inflammatory. Finally, the website stresses that grain-fed meats add to an imbalance between Omega-3s and Omega-6s that is common among Americans. Grass-fed beef, however, can help balance out the Omega-6s coming from grains. The website finishes this health benefit section by clarifying a common concern that red meat is not healthy.

Red meat, when it’s raised the proper way – Nature’s Way – is a superior source of nutrition! It’s great for your health! And who doesn’t want to a live long, active, healthy life? Good health is easily achieved, but only if you follow the laws of nature. Holistic Medicine is becoming more mainstream, and the evidence is mounting that the body will heal itself if given the proper nutrition. You have to eat food in its natural state, and grass-fed beef can be your cornerstone for low-fat, highly nutritious, lean protein.55

The “Nature’s Way” language here is reminiscent of the language of the Hallelujah Diet. In fact, the Baldwins put their faith in a different diet, “we are especially impressed with God’s Biblical health plan as it is presented in Dr. Jordan S. Rubin’s bestselling book The Maker’s Diet.”56 This Biblical diet differs from the Hallelujah Diet in that it allows for the consumption of meat - especially meat raised “Nature’s Way.” The Baldwins have also

54 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
been hearing from more doctors and customers that grass-fed cattle bones have medicinal value when they are used make broth. V. Mac let me know that they are shipping bones “all across the country.”

The health benefits from grass-fed beef make the extra time and resources it takes to raise cattle on grass worth it to the Baldwins. They have to clear a lot of land to have enough pasture for their growing herds. V. Mac isn’t just in the grass business, he’s also in “the land clearing business.” This business is restricted to certain land though. V. Mac informed me that they are only serious about buying land when it borders their property. Over the span of a few visits, I saw this land clearing in process. First, there was forest land filled with trees. Then they clear out all the trees and sell the lumber. Recently the Baldwins acquired a stump remover to assist them with this difficult process. They also hire temporary workers to help clear out land. When the land is cleared, they spread a bright turquoise mixture of grass seed and newspaper pulp.

When I commented on the color, V. Mac smiled and told me that “God made it look good.” Once the grass is planted, it needs fertilizer to thrive. The fertilizer at Baldwin Family Farms is provided by a secondary venture. It turns out that in order to run a profitable beef business, the Baldwins found they needed chickens.
V. Mac explained that they realized plant food was going to be a major expense early on so they started “hauling poultry litter to this farm and spreading it.” V. Mac was impressed with the litter so when he was offered an opportunity to add two poultry houses to the farm in 1995, he jumped at the chance. The houses were finished in 1996 and they liked them so much they built two more a few years later. When I asked why the litter was so exciting, V. Mac launched into a detailed exposition of chicken poop.

Well, the plant food that came out of those houses was just mind boggling – what that would do for land. It’s a very high organic plant food with all the N, P, and K that you need to grow good grass. And we produce about 300 tons of it every year out of each house. So having said that, plus the income, you know it’s a cash cow – it generates quite a bit of income for the work involved.

I encountered many surprises in my field work for this project, but visiting a grass-fed cattle farm that supplies Whole Foods and learning that chickens were the cash cow was probably the biggest shock. The Baldwins now have 8 hen houses. Each house initially costs $200,000-$250,000. Two are owned by V. Mac’s son. Each house generates about $700,000 per year. This income will be explained further below. In five years, all eight houses will be paid off so that money will come in as pure profit. V. Mac excitedly reported that beyond producing all the fertilizer he needs to grow grass and cows, “these breeder houses are my social security.” The chickens are the lynchpin of the entire operation. Their litter has fertilized the grass for twenty years and allows the
Baldwins to grow both grass and cattle without chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The income the hen houses generate allows V. Mac to continue purchasing land around his farm and increasing his herd. V. Mac wears many hats besides the rugged straw one that never leaves his head. He is in the beef business but he is also a grass farmer, a land clearer, and a chicken breeder.

4.5 Breeding: A Tale of Two Species

The fieldwork for this project meant that I had my feet in a lot of different places at once. That only caused a problem once. During my second visit to Baldwin Family Farms in June 2015 while V. Mac and I were out on the ATV collecting soil samples I noticed the rows of giant white buildings with metal roofs and asked V. Mac what they were. He said that the chickens lived there. I asked what the chickens are for - eggs or meat? He told me that they’re breeding chickens. The breeder chickens lay one fertilized egg per day. For every egg that is sent to Allen Harim in Delaware, Baldwin Family Farms receives $.05. That didn’t seem like a lot, but there are about 10,000 breeder hens in each house that work together to produce about 2 million eggs per year. Sensing my interest in the hen houses, V. Mac offered to show me one. We drove over a bridge to the hen houses and V. Mac started explaining that the area was bio-secure. We would need to wash our feet and the car to enter the area where the breeder houses stood. As we pulled up to the bio-security station, V. Mac remembered that I mentioned something
about witnessing a chicken slaughter recently.\textsuperscript{65} He asked when that had happened. I told him it had been two days prior and I was wearing different shoes, clothes, and everything. He turned the car around and drove away from the hen houses. As he drove he told me that there was an avian flu scare in the Midwest and that he couldn’t take any chances that I might carry something into the bio-secure area. The bio-security is regulated by both the company, Allen Harim, that V. Mac breeds for and by the FDA. I never did get to go into the hen houses. Beyond learning that I was a biohazard, I realized that I needed to reevaluate V. Mac’s approach to animal welfare.\textsuperscript{66}

During later visits, I asked more questions about the chickens and their relationship to the cows. V. Mac explained: “Everything on the farm relates to multiplicity. Each cow has to have a calf every year. The hens have to lay an egg every day to be profitable. It’s a sex farm.”\textsuperscript{67} V. Mac grows chickens to buy land to plant grass, which he fertilizes with chicken litter, all in an effort to grow cows. For V. Mac, there was no issue here. Having visited other farms that benefit from chicken litter but do so by letting them roam, I asked why they don’t go outside. V. Mac reminded me that his operation is not small - he cannot use chickens to fertilize thousands of acres of land by letting them roam around. He also showed me the turf they stand on to show me that they get about a square foot of space, which is enough room for them to move around.

\textsuperscript{65} I attended a kosher slaughter (shechitah) demonstration as research for a conference paper on June 7, 2015, two days prior to this visit to Baldwin Family Farms.

\textsuperscript{66} Participant Observation, Baldwin Family Farms, June 9, 2015.

\textsuperscript{67} V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015
The turf sits slanted so the eggs roll right down the production line. My question was really about why cows were able to graze on open pastures and chickens lived in crowded houses, so I rephrased the question and asked why the chickens didn’t get the same access to the outdoors that he grants the cows. V. Mac understood and provided a different answer.

The hens eat corn. Hens and swine, poultry and swine are corn eaters. There’s a little bit of soymeal to balance it out with protein. But she needs energy. Concentrated energy. She doesn’t have a rumen like a cow. A cow can stuff hundreds of pounds almost in him. A chicken can only eat so much feed a day. So that’s not saying that grain is bad it’s just we know that there’s no omega-3 in the chicken, it’s in cattle. So here we go again.68

In keeping with V. Mac’s attention to “Nature’s Way,” chickens eat corn and soymeal because what the chicken needs is energy. Eating grass would not help her, and certainly would not enable her to lay an egg per day. V. Mac indicated that his breeder houses are much cleaner and safer than the broiler houses where chickens are grown for meat. He told me that whereas there are about 10,000 hens in each of his houses, about 80,000 chickens occupy each broiler house. I was reminded of a valuable lesson as I chatted with V. Mac about chickens. Animal welfare is contextual and relative. V. Mac conceptualizes the needs of chickens differently than those of the cows. Chicken is not as valuable a commodity, so it is not handled the same way. The fact that V. Mac sees himself primarily as a grass farmer is an essential factor here. Chickens provide both income and fertilizer. The chickens themselves are part of a larger system. They are part

68 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
of the multiplicity that V. Mac alluded to. Their fertility enables the grass and the cows to grow.

As V. Mac and I continued our tour of the farm and soil sample collecting, he detailed the breeding procedure that he uses with the cows. He breeds the cows in August. This is one of the major reasons that he values the Charolais breed - their white coloring keeps them cooler, which means they are willing to breed during the hottest days of the North Carolina summers. V. Mac has found the Charolais heifers to be quite fertile. He breeds two-year old virgin heifers with Charolais semen purchased from the American Breeder Service. For the experienced heifers, V. Mac moves his own breeding bulls around the farm and the breeding happens without human intervention. V. Mac brings a veterinarian out to test the bull semen before he breeds them. This year, of his 59 bulls, only two were “shooting blanks.” V. Mac was pleased with this percentage. The two shooting blanks will be transitioned from breeding to beef. This doesn’t always go smoothly. V. Mac shared a story about some of his cows that live up in Virginia. When the heifers were in heat, a black angus bull jumped a fence two fields away and bred half of the heifers before anyone noticed. V. Mac hasn’t quite decided what to do with the mixed breed calves that resulted from this incident. He keeps a close eye on his mama cows and their calves. All the calves are tagged at birth. Female cows and calves have

69 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
70 V. Mac Baldwin, June 9, 2015.
71 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
one tag in each ear. Male steers and calves have one tag. Male calves are grown for beef unless they show promise as a breeding bull. Female calves are mostly kept on site, though they are used for beef if they need the supply. When females fail to breed or nurse or carry calves to term, they are moved to the beef side. V. Mac speaks matter-of-factly about both the chicken and cow breeding procedures. He does what he can to utilize natural processes and fills in with human intervention as necessary. His approach to animal husbandry takes the needs of both the farm and the animal into account but in the end, the needs of the farm triumph over the needs of individual animals.

4.6 Religion and Beef

In the end, all of the cattle V. Mac raises end up as beef. He lamented to me that “People forget that animals have to die to eat meat.”

This is something he sees and participates in every day, but some of his customers struggle with the concept. He told a story about a woman who once called his phone. She asked how the cows die - and lowered her voice and whispered “die” in hushed tones. V. Mac told her that his animals die in a humane way. He gave her the details - they are rendered unconscious and then their throats are slit through and they bleed out. He told her that this process helps them die without suffering. The woman was shocked. She told V. Mac she didn’t think she could keep eating meat. This is not the conclusion he was hoping she would

72 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
arrive at. V. Mac stresses to his customers that he has chosen a good processor whom he trusts and who treats his animals well.\textsuperscript{73}

I asked V. Mac how his relationship with Abdul Chaudhry began.\textsuperscript{74} He informed me that large processing plants have taken over the industry. It is difficult to find processors willing to do small custom jobs. It happened that Chaudhry Halal Meat Co. Inc. in Siler City, NC was the closest small-scale processor. V. Mac met with Abdul and recalled his thoughts from that initial meeting.

We learned that he was Muslim but also in that period of time we met his family and we assessed that he was, number one, an honest man, and number two, capable of doing a good job. He knew we were Christian, we knew he was Muslim. And we respected each other. And so that’s been an ongoing relationship now for twelve going on fifteen years.\textsuperscript{75}

V. Mac considers Abdul a personal friend. One of the first times I asked about his relationship with Chaudhry meats, V. Mac told me that he is the best processor and he is honest. Then he continued, “sadly, he’s going to miss Heaven.” V. Mac has been doing business with Abdul for years, and he has viewed this relationship as an opportunity to talk to Abdul about Jesus. He has many stories about his conversations with Abdul about Muhammad, Jesus, and sin.\textsuperscript{76} V. Mac let me know that he receives many emails from people he identifies as Fundamentalist Christians who are upset about the halal

\textsuperscript{73} V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
\textsuperscript{74} I have reached out to Abdul Chaudhry to try and arrange an interview but I have not heard back.
\textsuperscript{75} V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
\textsuperscript{76} V. Mac is unabashed in his attempts to convince those who are going to miss Heaven that Jesus is the savior. I told him up front that I am Jewish and he frequently raised theological points or practical questions and issues meant to get me thinking about Jesus.
slaughter, noting that “they badmouthed him pretty bad.” I asked V. Mac how he responds to them and he replied, “I say I’m doing missionary work. They have to accept that.” He told me that Abdul is exposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ every time V. Mac sees him and that is what he tells these customers.

Beyond this missionary impulse, V. Mac also seems to view his partnership with Chaudhry as a service to his friend. V. Mac has some very specific ideas about how the slaughter functions for Abdul. The first day I met V. Mac he cited John 19:30: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” He told me that these were the last words of Jesus and that then continued with his exegesis. “‘It is finished.’ - What is finished? The atoning system for sin was finished. Christians believe it and receive it by faith and their sins are atoned through this process.” V. Mac and I had this same conversation a few times during my visits. On each occasion he stressed to me that Christians do not need to sacrifice animals to atone for their sins because Jesus died for their sins. However, V. Mac believes that both kosher and halal slaughter are used by Jews and Muslims to atone for sin.80

87 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
88 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
89 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
80 I suggested that Jews and Muslims don’t view slaughter or the kosher and halal systems in relation to sin but he was unconvinced. I did manage to point out the fact that kosher and halal slaughter procedures are not identical.
When an animal is sacrificed, blood is appropriated for their [Muslims'] sins. They are doing it for sin reasons - they want their sin debt paid. Man is constantly trying to get right with God over his sin problem. This is why Christians are not concerned over whether it is kosher or halal - all Christians have to do about the sin problem is believe it and receive it - Jesus was the sacrifice for sin - the advocate who paid for sins.81

This explanation makes for a particularly interesting interreligious encounter. Chaudhry Meats is slaughtering the Baldwin beef in accordance with halal procedures and V. Mac and the team at Chaudhry have very different ideas about what is actually happening at the moment of slaughter, and how it is understood from a religious standpoint. Halal slaughter is not understood by Muslims to be related to releasing sin debts. Rather, it is about submission to Allah and Allah’s will.

The fact that the meat is then sold to customers at Whole Foods who are unaware and likely uninterested in the theological explanations attached to the death of the animal they plan to eat adds another level of interpretation to the situation. I checked the two Whole Foods stores closest to me (Durham and Chapel Hill) and the Baldwin beef was not identified as halal at either store. V. Mac’s Christianity is also absent from Whole Foods marketing materials. The Baldwin Grass-fed Beef Website banner contained a citation for a Bible verse until very recently. Above the Baldwin logo in red letters was “III John 2.” This verse, meant for all of Baldwin’s customers, reads “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” In November, V. Mac partnered with Whole Foods to put up a forty by

81 V. Mac Baldwin, June 4, 2015.
sixty billboard on I-85/I-40. The billboard image is now the banner image on the Baldwin Grass-Fed Beef website. The Bible verse is gone. V. Mac hinted at reason for this change when he told me about the customers they are trying to reach through Whole Foods.

And so where we sit up here in Caswell County, we’re about an hour, hour and fifteen or twenty minutes from right in the heart of RTP and where there are lots of people that love to eat healthy and they have above average incomes and so we try to make them our friends and invite them up here and get to know them and get acquainted through the internet.\footnote{V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.}

The Whole Foods customers are not in search of meat raised with a Biblical pastoralist ethic or meat that is certified halal. They are looking to eat healthy. V. Mac told me that the billboard has been a success and beamed as he told me “that part of the operation is growing like gangbusters.”\footnote{V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.}

4.7 Conclusion

It is clear that religion is only part of this example of an alternative meat producer. The customer is the reason alternatives like Baldwin Family Farms are able to exist and thrive. In fact, the reason Whole Foods carries Baldwin Beef is because the customers demanded it. V. Mac told me that when he first started selling his meat directly, they began with a booth at the Carrboro Farmer’s Market. The customers liked the beef so much they wanted to be able to buy it all the time. They started to talk to Dan Thomas, who was the team leader at the Chapel Hill Whole Foods at that time. Eventually, Dan Thomas came out to the market and asked V. Mac what was so good

\footnote{V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.}
about his beef. V. Mac told him to try it because he wanted to “let the beef speak for itself.”\textsuperscript{84} Not long after that, Dan Thomas started carrying Baldwin Grass-Fed Beef.

Baldwin Family Farms supplies to nine Whole Foods Stories and number of Kroger stores, but they still go to the Carrboro Farmer’s Market every Sunday because it provides an opportunity to meet and talk to the customers. V. Mac stressed the importance of his customer.

\begin{quote}
So basically, our market is the consumer. And she’s driving this bus. If she didn’t like our beef, we’d be out of business. So we do everything we can to figure out what the consumer wants and then produce it in such a package that she likes. Vacuum sealed, high quality vacuum sealed that she can put in her freezer indefinitely with good labeling on it. So she can feel free to buy it in large quantities.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

V. Mac does everything he can to please the customers. He urges them to try his grass-fed beef so they can taste the difference, answers all of their questions about how the animals were treated, and deals with their questions and complaints about his partnership with Chaudhry Meats. On the Baldwin Grass-Fed Beef website, they list a set of principles that drive their interactions with customers.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} are the most important people in our business.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} are not dependent on us… we are dependent on them.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} are not an interruption of our work…they are the purpose of our work.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} do us a favor when they call… we are not doing them a favor by serving them.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} are of our business… not an outsider.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} have feelings and emotions just like our own.
\textbf{OUR CUSTOMERS} are not someone with which to argue.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{84} V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
\textsuperscript{85} V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
OUR CUSTOMERS are deserving of the most courteous and attentive treatment we can give them. OUR CUSTOMERS are the lifeblood of our business.86

At the end of the day, the Baldwins are selling meat to Americans whose values, ideas, and religious beliefs and practices differ from their own. V. Mac engages people in conversation about scripture when he can, but that is only possible if people are interested in his product. Christianity drives V. Mac, but customers drive his business. He offered me another Bible verse to explain the role of Christianity in his business:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”87 V. Mac loves God and feels called to put scripture in people’s hands. Baldwin’s grass-fed, antibiotic-free, hormone-free, halal beef has allowed him to minister to countless people, and he is hopeful that it will continue to provide these opportunities as his business grows.88 V. Mac’s Christian commitments and business acumen landed him in a broad entanglement of grass, chickens, cows, land, buildings, markets, regulations, retailers, processors, and customers. V. Mac seeks to spread the Gospel of Jesus to everyone he encounters in the alternative food system through his grass-fed beef. In an effort to meet the need of his customers and retailers, the Christian message is not coming through as overtly on packaging and marketing materials. Despite this fact, V. Mac’s Christian values do come through in the product

87 Rom. 8:28 KJV
88 V. Mac Baldwin, December 10, 2015.
itself – the grass-fed, antibiotic free, hormone free, and sometimes halal meat that he has dedicated the better part of his life to producing.
5. Release: The Reinvention of Shmita, the Jewish Agricultural Sabbatical Year, on American Soil

“Six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.”

(Jewish Publication Society, Exodus 23:10-11)

5.1 Introduction

On a hot sunny day in June 2015, the farm at the Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reisterstown, Maryland, was relatively quiet. A small group of volunteers was harvesting the last of the asparagus while another group was breaking down old wooden structures from the greenhouse beds. One of the staff people was cutting the lawn at the edges of the farm. I was sitting in a patch of chamomile harvesting the flowers with Shelby, a Chesapeake Conservation Corps Volunteer assigned to Pearlstone for the year. Eventually, the chamomile will be dried and given to the program staff for goat milk soap demonstrations. It is a calm task and one that contrasts drastically with the work I did when I volunteered on the farm in 2013. During that summer I worked with a group of farm apprentices planting, watering, weeding, pruning, hoeing, and harvesting produce for the community supported agriculture (CSA) program. In 2015, the four acres of land that are usually dedicated to raising vegetables and herbs for the CSA were in the midst of a year of release.
The apprentice program was suspended for the year. However, the fields are not barren. The two acres dedicated to perennial produce continues to produce. On the other two acres, the usual rows of squash, peppers, and tomatoes are absent but the fields still abound with vegetation. Buckwheat, barley and oats were planted to nurture and rejuvenate the soil. These cover crops are preventing soil erosion and adding nitrogen to the earth. Worms are moving through leaving nutrient rich castings as they go. Networks of mycorrhizal fungi are reconnecting all areas of the farm fostering communication underground. As I stood overlooking the land with the Farm Director, Greg, I marveled at how the farm was simultaneously the same and completely different from my first visit in 2013.
Greg concurred and suggested that what we were looking at was “just one degree different than what we would be looking at any other year that you would be standing in this spot. 99% of this is the same, but the 1% difference is the shmita\textsuperscript{1} ingredient in what our aspiration is right now.”\textsuperscript{2}

The “shmita ingredient” Greg referenced is Pearlstone’s interpretation of a revolutionary movement that recently cropped up in the United States with the goal of implementing shmita practices on American soil. Shmita is translated literally as “release” but it is more popularly translated as “sabbatical.” Shmita is a sabbath for the land. Similar to the weekly sabbath, a day of rest after six days of work, shmita is a year of rest for the land after it has been worked for six years. I argue that the introduction of

\textsuperscript{1} As is the case with the transliteration of many Hebrew words, there are various options for transliterating the Hebrew word שミיטה. I will use “shmita” because this is the spelling that the majority of the American Shmita movement texts utilize. Throughout this paper, when I am quoting other sources, I will maintain the transliteration used in the texts. Popular variations include shemita and shemittah. Similarly, capitalization will be maintained in citations and in the title of the movement, the Shmita Project, but I will otherwise avoid capitalization.

shmita to the United States was only possible in the creative Jewish agricultural spaces that are the results of the Jewish environmentalist movement. This chapter will begin with brief historical and halakhic overview of shmita. In the second section, I will discuss the ability for an innovative Jewish space like Pearlstone to reinvent and introduce Jewish practices like shmita. To be clear, there were other incubators for shmita observance in the United States, but my fieldwork took me to Pearlstone, so their interpretation of shmita is the one highlighted here. The third section describes the agricultural shmita practices introduced at Pearlstone and the human-centered initiatives that accompanied the agricultural aspects. Finally, as both this chapter and the shmita year draw to a close, I will reflect on the current state and future potential of shmita in the United States.

Shmita highlights both the importance and the sacred qualities attributed to land in Judaism. On Rosh Hashanah in September 2014 the Jewish year 5775, a shmita year, began. American Jewish environmentalists greeted the shmita year with a reimagined approach to sabbatical practices. This movement, brought together as part of the Shmita Project, a joint vision of a number of Jewish organizations focused on environmentalism. According to their website, “The Shmita Project is working to expand awareness about

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3 See chapter 2.
4 For information on the calculation of the sabbatical (and jubilee) years, please see B. (Benedict) Zuckerman, *A Treatise of the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Chronology of the Time Anterior and Subsequent to the Captivity: Accompanied by a Table of Sabbatical Years*, (New York: Hermon Press, 1974).
the biblical Sabbath tradition, and to bring the values of this practice to life today to support healthier, more sustainable Jewish communities.” 5 The leaders of the Shmita Project conceive of shmita as a node connecting a diverse and expansive network of Jewish organizations. The Shmita Project encapsulates a multivalent environmentalist strain of American Judaism that is deeply concerned with climate change, industrial agriculture and food insecurity and often expresses itself through food reform. The Shmita Project is inherently connected to a vast web of religious, environmental, and agricultural networks of the past and present in both the United States and Israel.

5.2 Shmita Through Texts & Time

“It’s in the Torah, in the land of Israel
To create equality for me and you-oo-oo-oo
We let the livestock and the wild creatures
eat from the land just like we do-oo-oo-oo
It’s a reminder to help each other always
And let go, let go, let go of anything you’re owed
And why oh why oh, why oh why oh why oh
is there still hunger when we know that there’s food out there

Shmita
  It’s a chance for us to relax
Shmita
  And take the load off our backs
Shmita
  It’s an exciting opportunity
Shmita
  To help in our community” 6


6 Lyrics from “Shmita: Rest and Release” set to the tune of “Hey Ya” by Outkast, Lyrics by Naomi Raphael, Music by Outkast, Pearlstone Center, October 2014/5775. Video of the entire song is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=is2Wt9_KByU.
Shmita is not a familiar concept for most American Jews. There are two main reasons for this. First, as noted in the first line of the song lyrics above, shmita is in the Torah, but it is not a required practice for Jews outside the land of Israel. Second, farming is not a popular career path among Jews in the United States, so most American Jews are not familiar with the agricultural laws. This was discussed in chapter two. Pearlstone’s former Program Director, Neely, offered an addendum to this explanation, “I think we’ve become a very indoors people. We’re People of the Book. You read the book inside instead of outside.” Other aspects of Jewish law take precedence over those that apply only in theory for a people that has become detached from land-based work. Shmita is discussed in Jewish texts infrequently and has likely never been observed completely. The song lyrics offer clues as to why shmita was not practiced. Shmita requires that land lays fallow, that animals and humans together subsist for the shmita years on perennial produce and that debts are released. Shmita may be “an exciting opportunity” but it is not one that can be enacted easily. A few leaders in the Jewish environmental movement drawn to the untapped potential of shmita for engaging Jews in environmentalism and sustainability, decided to bring shmita to the United States.

7 I use “land of Israel” here because the boundaries of the area where shmita is required are not the same as the boundaries of the modern state of Israel.
8 Neely Tal Snyder z”l died in a car accident on August 11, 2015.
In order to understand the revolutionary character of shmita, a discussion of the textual basis for shmita is required. The laws of shmita related to food and cultural systems are initially laid out in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible.

Six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves (Exodus 23:10-11 JPS).

These verses establish the agricultural practice of a Sabbath for the land and fair distribution of harvested foods during the seventh year for the Israelites. These verses also lay out the basic parameters for a number of shmita year practices. First, land must “rest and lie fallow.” This resulted in shmita year prohibitions against seeding, planting, and plowing land. The diet during shmita years was based on perennial crops and wild edibles because these plants did not need to be planted or cultivated. This text also lays out the basis of a cultural system that requires the fair distribution of food. The text reads ‘Let the needy among your people eat of it’ which is an important addendum in a culture where those without access to the land would otherwise fair poorly during the sabbatical years. Additionally, animals are considered in this holistic vision of the sabbatical cycle, as the text reads ‘and what they leave let the wild beasts eat.’

This basic description amended in the book of Leviticus with additional details regarding what is expressly forbidden during the sabbatical year as well as what the Israelites were meant to eat during that year.

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a Sabbath of the
Lord. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce – you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield (Leviticus 25:1-7 JPS).

The text in Leviticus clarifies that Israelites may eat perennial produce during the sabbatical year: “But you may eat whatever the land during its Sabbath will produce.” It also specifies forbidden practices – sowing, pruning, and reaping. In Leviticus, the purpose of the sabbatical year is added: “it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.’ According to Louis Newman, author of The Sanctity of the Seventh Year: A Study of Mishnah Tractate Shebiit, ‘implicit in this view is the notion that the Land of Israel has human qualities and needs” and it requires a sanctified day of rest.⁹ Some may object to the anthropocentrism inherent in Newman’s argument but it is clear that shmita puts forward the radical idea that the land gets overworked, and every seven years it needs to rest. Later in the same chapter in Leviticus, more information regarding the source of the sabbatical year food is found.

You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. And should you ask, ‘What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?’ I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. When you show in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in (Leviticus 25:18-22 JPS).

These verses point to the key role of the land in the relationship between the Israelite people and their God. God commands them to let their land lie fallow, and in return promises to provide enough perennial crops to last three years (the sixth, seventh, and eighth years in the sabbatical cycle). The land is able to provide enough food for all of the people and beasts for three years because God has promised to bless it. Newman argues that this is the explanation for why the sabbatical year for the land applies only in the land of Israel: ‘The Land of Israel, unlike all other countries, is enchanted, for it enjoys a unique relationship to God and to the people of Israel.”  

This unique relationship exists because the land of Israel was promised to Abraham and his descendants as part of his covenant with God. Newman continued: “Israelites must observe the restrictions of the seventh year as an affirmation of the unique bond between God’s holy land and his chosen people.” So, the land is a vital actor in the covenant between the Israelites and their God and for this reason, the land too requires a Sabbath.

Additional references to the shmita year, which also detail the economic and cultural practices associated with the shmita year are found throughout the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy, 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Nehemiah and 2 Chronicles. These texts expand upon the agricultural restrictions of Exodus, establish a system of debt relief

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during the shmita year and prescribe a public Torah reading during Sukkot of the shmita year. These texts also describe the timing and requirements of the Jubilee year. The Jubilee year occurs after seven cycles of seven years, in the fiftieth year.\textsuperscript{14} According to the text of Leviticus during the Jubilee year slaves and prisoners must be set free, land must be released from ownership and debts must be forgiven.\textsuperscript{15}

The rabbis interpreted the biblical texts on shmita but after the destruction of the Second Temple the sabbatical cycle was often discussed but rarely enforced. Gerald Blidstein, author of “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” asserts that shmita is representative of “the commonplace struggle between a radical religious demand and an un-consenting world.”\textsuperscript{16} Blidstein suggests that the potency of shmita lies in its power:

\begin{quote}
[W]e have here an institution that in its essence contests the legitimacy of the world, and threatens to become not merely the symbolic repudiation of its normal social and economic patterns, but its real menace and ultimately its victor\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The disruptive potential of shmita posed a threat to the agricultural economy of the late ancient world and as time went on, the strength of shmita began to diminish.

Given these factors, it is rather extraordinary that shmita is the topic of the fifth tractate of Seder Zeraim (‘Order of Seeds’) entitled Shevi’it (‘Seventh Year’). Louis Newman argues that the decision to include an entire tractate on shmita was, in fact,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} There is some disagreement over whether the Jubilee year occurs in year forty-nine or in year fifty of the cycle. For more information see Zuckerman, \textit{A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee}. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Lev. 25:13-18, 23-35 \\
\textsuperscript{16} Gerald Jacob Blidstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” Tradition 9, no. 4 (1966), 50. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Blidstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” 50.
\end{flushright}
surprising, given that none of the other surviving texts of late antiquity contain
discussion of the sabbatical year.\textsuperscript{18} Newman proposes that shmita was highlighted in the
Mishnah because it empowered ordinary Israelites.\textsuperscript{19} After the destruction of the Second
Temple, the Israelites may have questioned their covenant with God and shmita enabled
them to enact God’s will. Newman stresses that the Mishnah’s attention to shmita
reflects an emphasis on the fact that the Israelite people were “the sole surviving source
of sanctification.”\textsuperscript{20} It was up to the Israelites to maintain the holiness of the Land of
Israel by adhering to the requirements of shmita as a vital aspect of their relationship
with God. It was the authorities of the Mishnah that determined the boundaries within
which shmita would apply “by delineating several distinct geographical regions of the
Land within which the various restrictions of the Sabbatical year take effect.”\textsuperscript{21} The
rabbis of the Mishnah discussed shmita at length and established its boundaries, but
they were not necessarily in favor of continuing to abide by the shmita laws. Jeremy
Benstein, author of \textit{The Way Into Judaism and the Environment}, notes that “Rabbi Judah the
Prince, redactor of the Mishnah, called for the annulment of the \textit{shmitah} year because its
implementation was so arduous.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Newman, \textit{The Sanctity of the Seventh Year}, 20.
\textsuperscript{19} Newman, \textit{The Sanctity of the Seventh Year}, 117-20.
\textsuperscript{20} Newman, \textit{The Sanctity of the Seventh Year}, 20.
\textsuperscript{21} Newman, \textit{The Sanctity of the Seventh Year}, 19.
Once the majority of the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel after the destruction of the Second Temple, shmita was weakened. Blidstein explains that the rabbis understood the exile “as a disruption in the ideal state of Israel’s relation to God through the land.”

Blidstein continues, “the Torah no longer expected the Jew to continue as if nothing had changed; God Himself had declared and decreed the change.” The exile brought a reclassification for shmita from Torah law (d’oraita) to rabbinic law (d’rabbanan). Blidstein clarifies that as a rabbinic law shemittah can be narrowed, limited, and in effect abolished.

This shift is seen most clearly in the rabbinic texts that followed the Mishnah. Shmita is discussed in tractate Shevi’it in Seder Zeraim in the Palestinian Talmud, but this tractate was not included in the Babylonian Talmud. When shmita was mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, the discussed often related to the debt forgiveness aspects of shmita, since they were initially understood to apply outside the land of Israel.

Rabbis continued to discuss shmita in their legal treatises, but these discussions were mainly theoretical because the majority of the Jewish people were living outside the land of Israel. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Moses Maimonides determined that there was a scientific explanation for shmita. According to Ronald Isaacs, author of The

26 The Rabbis devised a system of transferring debts to the court during shmita years. This system, called the prozbul, ensured that lenders would not suffer when debts were cancelled during the sabbatical year, thus protecting the poor from lenders refusing to loan money during year six of the sabbatical cycle.
Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology, Maimonides wrote that “allowing the land to lie fallow gives it an opportunity to rejuvenate itself and yield more abundant crops in the years to come.” Maimonides also included detailed rulings about the shmita year in his major work, the Mishneh Torah. Although shmita continued to appear in major rabbinic works, shmita remained an ideal instead of a reality.

The absence of a practical history became a problem in the late nineteenth century when Jews began to immigrate to Ottoman-ruled Palestine in large numbers. The rabbinic leadership came up with a solution, the heter mekhira (sale permit), in anticipation of the shmita year 1888-1889. The heter mekhira is a leniency that allows Jewish farmers to sell their land to non-Jews for the year thus exempting it from the shmita regulations. Julian Sinclair, who recently published a translation of Rabbi (Rav) Abraham Isaac Kook’s influential Shabbat Ha’aretz, (Sabbath of the Land) discusses the implementation of the heter mekhira in his introduction.

With the advent of the shmita of 1888-89, it was clear to the pioneers that observing the sabbatical year as commanded in the Bible would be economically ruinous and would likely lead to the extinction of the nascent agricultural settlements. Sinclair stresses that the heter mekhira “was seen as a temporary expedient” that “was renewed for the shmita years of 1895-1896 and 1902-1903” amid much controversy. By

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28 The new translation of Shabbat Ha’aretz was published by Hazon.
30 Kook, Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz, 35.
the shmita year 1909-1910, the agricultural settlements had grown but were still unable to withstand full shmita observance.\textsuperscript{31} It was in anticipation of this shmita year that Rav Kook published \textit{Shabbat Ha’aretz}. Sinclair argues that in the book, Kook endorsed the heter mekhira “but throughout Shabbat Ha’aretz, and particularly its introduction, shines a vision of how shmita could be much more than it is today.”\textsuperscript{32} Blidstein also emphasizes the “anguish” that plagued Rav Kook as he sanctioned the heter mekhira and his hopes for a future shmita observance: “so the reality of shevi’it must be deferred, hints Rav Kook, until the Messianic age.”\textsuperscript{33} Rav Kook, who later became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandate Palestine, is still seen as authoritative on shmita by many Israelis, but controversy over the heter mekhira persists. The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews in Israel follow the position of Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, known as the Hazon Ish. According to Julain Sinclair “The Hazon Ish believed that the Torah prohibition of selling land in Israel to non-Jews\textsuperscript{34} was an insurmountable obstacle to the heter mekhira.”\textsuperscript{35} Sinclair explains that “[d]uring the shmita, his followers eat produce that is imported, grown by Arabs, or they rely on the otzar beit din method.”\textsuperscript{36} The otzar beit din (the rabbinic court’s storehouse) method refers to a system in which fields are handed over to the court for shmita and the court oversees the care of the

\textsuperscript{31} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 36.
\textsuperscript{32} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 21.
\textsuperscript{33} Blidstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” 51.
\textsuperscript{34} Deut. 7:1-2 JPS
\textsuperscript{35} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 145.
\textsuperscript{36} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 145.
fields, collection of produce and distribution of produce to the public. Many Torah-observant Jews adhere to the laws of shmita through these methods and this remains a point of contention between the Orthodox and Haredi Jews in Israel. Secular Jews engaged in agriculture in Israel tend not to observe shmita. And now a small number of Jews in America do observe shmita.

5.3 American Shmita

This was the first time the staff at the farm at Pearlstone observed shmita. In 2007, Jakir, the current Executive Director of Pearlstone, started the farm, which was then called Kayam Farm. During that first year, somebody asked Jakir what they were going to do about the shmita year that was set to begin that fall. Jakir didn’t really know what they were talking about. He mentioned that he had seen shmita in a text somewhere, but that it was very unfamiliar. That winter, Jakir heard Nati Passow speak at the Hazon Food Conference.37 Passow, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Jewish Farm School, became a leader in the shmita movement. He published an article about shmita in 2008 that contains many of the ideas he shared at the Hazon Food Conference. He urged American Jews to learn about and consider shmita.

And while the agricultural laws apply only within the borders of biblical Israel, there is so much potential to use the shemita year as a foundation for renewed Jewish ecological education around the world, for shemita requires of us a humility and reverence for that which is greater than any one person.38

Passow also laid out three main ideas that he found in shmita after he analyzed the relevant texts. The first idea he identified was a “need to rethink our concepts of ownership and the inherent entitlement we assume to exploit our natural resources for our benefit alone.” The second idea was a need “to cultivate a sense of empathy and compassion for the less fortunate and more vulnerable members of our society.” The third and final idea that Passow discerned was an overall goal for the Jewish community - “to create systems that benefit the whole rather than encourage the accumulation of material wealth among a minority of individuals.”

Jakir was inspired by the speech and by the concept of shmita. This really just hit me, how powerful this paradigm is, to commit to think in long term holistic ecological cycles, social cycles, social community life beyond…industrial food and industrial society, industrial culture.

Jakir was inspired by the potential of shmita. He talked to Nati after the speech and committed to bringing shmita to the farm at Pearlstone, even though he and the farm had only been there for a year at that point. Jakir and Nati became close friends and continued to research shmita throughout the next seven years. During those seven years, shmita began to gain traction and an audience in the United States. When I attended the Teva Seminar on Jewish Outdoor, Food and Environmental Education in

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42 Jakir Manela.
43 Jakir Manela.
44 Jakir Manela.
2013, Nati led sessions on shmita to prepare Jewish leaders for the upcoming shmita year. We talked about the agricultural practices, but we also spent a great deal of time discussing debt release and communal responsibility. At that same seminar, I attended a session led by Yigal Deutscher, author of *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture//The Shmita Manifesto*, which I will discuss below. Both Yigal and Nati went on to manage the Shmita Project at Hazon.

Even in the relatively new world of Jewish environmentalism, the Shmita Project is young. Nigel Savage, Executive Director of Hazon, writes in *Shabbat Ha’aretz*, “at Hazon, we have been working on shmita fairly steadily since 2008.” This is the same year that the article by Nati Passow, cited above, appeared in *Jewish Education News*. Although the practical implementation of the Shmita Project is a recent development, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a leader in the Jewish Renewal Movement and Founding Director of The Shalom Center, suggested an adaptation of the sabbatical year in the 1990s “as a way to enforce cessation of economic activity and promote reflection concerning the effects of our work and economy on the earth and each other.” This aspect of shmita appealed to Jeremy Benstein as well.

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45 See chapter two for more information about Jewish environmentalism.
46 *Kook, Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’aretz*, 15.
Indeed, the biblical *shmitah* is a stirring example of an entire society choosing to live at a significantly lower material standard for a year in order to devote itself to more spiritual pursuits than the daily grind.48

The spiritual appeal of shmita that entranced Waskow and Benstein remained a part of the Shmita Project as it grew. In its current form, the Shmita project is a partnership between Hazon, 7Seeds, and the Jewish Farm School. The Shmita Project is small in numbers but its leaders are connected through Hazon and the broader world of Jewish Outdoor, Food, and Environmental Education (JOFEE) to each other and to an expansive list of Jewish and non-Jewish environmental organizations and individuals. Together, they reimagined shmita and worked to enact their vision in the 2014-2015 shmita year.

The Shmita Project is not only located within an American context, it is enabled by that American context. The history of shmita reveals a resistance to observing the sabbatical year, within the land of Israel for economic and social reasons and outside the land of Israel for legal reasons. The United States in the early twenty-first century provided the perfect setting for the implementation of this environmentally-focused revitalization of an ancient religious practice. This context brought together a potent combination of a growing concern about the global environmental crisis, increasingly industrialized food production, and an atmosphere that enables and even encourages religious cooperation and innovation.

As the example of Pearlstone will show, the actors and actions embedded in the networks shmita creates are not exclusively Jewish. The farm and the conference center cater to Jewish and non-Jewish groups and they have brought shmita into Jewish and non-Jewish settings. The staff at Pearlstone is mostly comprised of people who identify as Jews, but there are many non-Jewish people on staff as well. Shmita also brings the connections between humans, animals, plants and the earth to the fore. Shmita exists in the very material world of food production. Blidstein highlights this central aspect of shmita in the Mishnah when he writes, “shevi’it demands the equalization of all who live off the soil.”\(^49\) Shmita, at its very heart, is focused on the needs of the land, not humans. The texts related to shmita identify the land as sacred and it is so valued in the Biblical text that it requires rest along with the Jewish people and their God. In this non-anthropocentric network, shmita is the soil it seeks to repair, the seeds that will be stored instead of planted, the wild edibles it promotes for consumption, and the animals it hopes to feed and protect. Any attempt at enacting shmita involves and affects a cadre of people, animals, things, ideas, and organizations. Each of these actors is vital to shmita’s feasibility and success. Even the Shmita Project is enmeshed in a web of organizations and individuals focused on animal rights, environmental protection, food reform, agricultural industry, and Judaism in America, Israel and beyond. Nigel Savage suggests that shmita might provide a locale for interfaith cooperation.

\(^49\) Blidstein, “Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year,” 49.
I hope that as this century unfolds, the Jewish tradition of shmita may become an opportunity to learn and share among religious traditions of all sorts. What would a Tibetan Buddhist make of shmita? How does a Native American read Rav Kook? ... We hope that, in due course, some of these conversations will unfold.\textsuperscript{50}

The staff at Pearlstone is comprised of people from different religious traditions, so this chapter will include some practical answers to Savage’s questions about how people from other faith traditions understand shmita. Savage also aspired to a shmita-based connection between religious and non-religious people.

Those of you whose focus is not religion but, for instance, permaculture; land use; crop rotation; cohousing and intentional community; ecological restoration… if you are involved in any or all of these topics, or a hundred others, we hope that you will read this book, discuss it with your friends, teach it, critique it, and, most of all, engage deeply with it.\textsuperscript{51}

The Shmita Project is a Jewish network but it actively works to participate in a larger conversation. The extent to which the Shmita Project is connected to other religious and non-religious movements is enabled by the religious diversity and tendency towards religious mixing and innovation present in the contemporary United States. There are two main texts of the Shmita Project, \textit{Envisioning Sabbatical Culture//A Shmita Manifesto} and \textit{The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook}, provided a foundation for the practice of shmita in the United States. I will discuss these briefly to provide a sense of the goals of the Shmita Project and before moving to an analysis of how shmita was implemented at Pearlstone.

\textsuperscript{50} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 14.
\textsuperscript{51} Kook, \textit{Rav Kook’s Introduction to Shabbat Ha’Aretz}, 14-15.
In *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture//A Shmita Manifesto*, Yigal Deutscher lays out a broad vision for the American Jewish community with goals of healing the world. Deutscher was the founding manager of the Shmita Project and he directs 7Seeds, “an educational platform weaving together Jewish wisdom traditions & Permaculture Design strategies”52 Deutscher highlights the aspects of the shmita culture that he hopes will inspire a new holistic sensibility in American Jewry.

Shmita is more than a calendar year; it is primarily a way of being, a blueprint for a sacred, whole-systems culture, one grounded in vibrant, healthy and diverse relations between self, community, ecology, economy & spirit.53

In a slim book that brims with spiritual language, Kabbalistic diagrams, and artistic renditions of shmita concepts, Deutscher lays out the essential elements of a ‘sabbatical food system.’ The focus of the sabbatical food system is land stewardship. As mentioned earlier, the prohibition against seeding, planting and plowing requires a reliance on perennial produce and wild edibles and Deutscher highlights the importance of these foods in his proposed sabbatical food system. He also stresses gathering the harvest at full ripeness, eating harvests in their natural growing season and eating harvests locally. Deutscher identifies the “broken link” between food producers and consumers as a central problem in American society and he sees this problem as one that the shmita year can address head on. He argues that a connection to the land our food comes from

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is vital. He explains that the shmita year “offers us a direct challenge to re-enter the sacred relationship with food production, distribution and consumption.” Deutscher offers his vision for a reconnection with the land and with food through indirect channels. Since most American Jews do not seed, plant or plow in order to eat, the Shmita Project is geared more towards the potential inspirational aspects of shmita. In keeping with these educational and inspirational aims, towards the end of his manifesto, Deutscher offers over one hundred ways to ‘ReNew Shmita Culture.’ Deutscher’s suggestions are divided into three categories that reflect his shmita triad – community food systems, community economic systems and community design systems. In the section on food systems, Deutscher encourages establishing personal and communal perennial gardens, hosting harvest parties, composting, becoming familiar with wild edibles, buying local, organic and seasonal produce and storing the harvest by canning, preserving, fermenting and drying as well as many additional suggestions. Deutscher brought these ideas with him when he joined forces with Hazon as the founding manager of the Shmita Project.

Many of the ideas laid out in *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture* were fleshed out in later Shmita Project resources. *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook*, authored by Yigal Deutscher along with Hazon staffer Anna Hanau and executive director Nigel Savage,

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moves Deutscher’s broad vision into a practical handbook meant for use in Jewish communities. *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* contains one hundred and twenty-five pages of biblical and rabbinic texts, resources, and suggestions so that American Jews can become educated about shmita and act in accordance with the essence of shmita. These texts are provided in order to inspire action among American Jews.

If Shmita was a radical, challenging proposition back in early Israelite culture, how much more so today, in an era of industrial agriculture and the global marketplace! After all this time of dormancy, the time has come to once again explore this question of Shmita. And in doing so, let us meet this ancient tradition anew, ripe and fresh, to harvest her lessons for us today, and begin a conversation which will ripple into years to come, many generations ahead.57

The sourcebook authors are explicit about their intentions to reinvent shmita. In accordance with their goal of resurrecting this ancient tradition for use in the modern world, *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* lays out the central shmita principles that they hope will inspire American Jews to adopt a sabbatical mindset. For each shmita principle, one or two environmental and/or cultural issues are highlighted and creative responses are offered with resources for further information. A total of sixteen shmita principles are listed and detailed in the sourcebook. These principles are divided into five categories: A Yearlong Shabbat, A Sabbatical Food System, Community & Food Security, Community & Economic Resiliency and Jubilee Release. As an example of some of the individual principles, the Sabbatical Food System principles listed in the sourcebook are Land

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Stewardship, Perennial/Wild Harvest, Eat Local, Seasonal Diet, and Animal Care. The Community & Food Security principles include Creating Commons, Shared Harvest, Fair Distribution and Waste Reduction, are listed under the heading Community & Food Security.\textsuperscript{58} It is important to mention that the Sabbatical Food System is given much more attention in the sourcebook than it received in Deutscher’s manifesto. Where it was included as one third of Deutscher’s original tripartite vision for shmita, the authors of sourcebook, a group that includes Deutscher, dedicate more than half of their Sabbatical Principles to foodways. The relevancy of these food-based principles to contemporary conversations about food production in the United States are likely the motivation behind this promotion of food reform as the primary point of shmita year action. The remaining principles are concerned with the economic aspects of the shmita year and the Jubilee year. These principles are described at length in the sourcebook and they are paired with religious and non-religious actions, or ‘creative responses’ to embody the spirit of the shmita year. The creative responses offered fall into one of two types: they are either intended for action on the individual level, or they offer a national or international organization working in the area that would benefit from monetary support and increased awareness and education. So, readers can either participate in direct action or they can act by learning more, spreading the word, or contributing money. All of the principles are tied to Jewish texts and rooted in Jewish tradition but

\textsuperscript{58} Deutscher, Hanau, and Savage, \textit{The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook}, 70.
the authors tend to use secular and scientific sources to provide evidence for the importance of attending to these shmita principles. The authors are working to mobilize American Jews around environmentalism, sustainability and animal rights by re-introducing them to shmita. The sourcebook offers actionable items so that all American Jews who are interested can participate in the shmita year.

Both *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture* and *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* focus a great deal of attention on bringing shmita to American Jews who are not involved in agriculture. But what about those who are? When American Jews began to discuss the possibility of bringing shmita to the United States it appealed to the growing Jewish environmentalism movement, but for those with agricultural ventures, it also presented quite a challenge. Shamu Sadeh, the Director of Adamah at Isabella Freedman, came up with a creative system wherein they rotate their fields so that one-seventh of the fields are cover cropped at all times. Adamah also donates at least one-seventh of their produce to people in need. During the shmita year, the Adamah staff also set aside a plot of land at the entrance to Isabella Freedman for a shmita garden. This community garden was open to everyone on staff at Isabella Freedman and people in the surrounding community. On Sundays, the shmita garden has open hours where people come and work in the garden and take home produce.59 The Adamah Spring Fellows decided the shmita year presented a good opportunity to release music as well. They

recorded and produced a digital album.\textsuperscript{60} These creative interpretations of shmita enabled Adamah to continue their CSA and their fellowship program during shmita years\textsuperscript{61} while observing shmita in spirit.\textsuperscript{62} At Pearlstone, the timing of the shmita year and their identity as a site for innovative Judaism in the Baltimore area allowed them to bring that spirit, along with some of the more traditional aspects of shmita to life in Maryland.

\textit{5.4 Innovative Spaces, Creative Practices}

When the program staff at Pearlstone received a shmita-themed game that had been developed by a former coworker, they decided to adapt it for use with kids. They utilized their version countless times throughout the shmita year.\textsuperscript{63} David, a Program Associate at Pearlstone, described the shmita simulation game to me. Each player is allotted a set amount of food and assigned a persona - a servant, farmer or stone mason, for example. Then they play rounds that represent the years leading up to shmita. They get cards that allow them to accumulate blankets and food for themselves and their slaves. When the shmita year comes around, their slaves and their debts are freed and they may or may not have enough food and blankets to get through the year. David

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{60} The album is titled “Release: Songs for Shmita.” It is available at https://hazon.bandcamp.com/album/release-songs-for-shmita.
\footnotetext{61} All of the interviews and experiences described at Adamah occurred during the summer of 2015.
\footnotetext{62} For more information about shmita at Adamah, please see http://hazon.org/shmita-project/adamah-in-shmita/.
\footnotetext{63} Naomi Raphael, Interview with author, Pearlstone Staff Lounge, June 17, 2015.
\end{footnotes}
explained, “people who get the game will share.” The program staff said the game has worked quite well as an educational tool about shmita. The simulation also highlights one of the most important aspects of shmita - creativity. Just as players may have to improvise during the shmita year when they find themselves without enough food, observing shmita at Pearlstone also required a bit of imaginative thinking and collaboration.

At Pearlstone, creativity is central to their identity. Pearlstone is located just fifteen minutes from the main building of the Baltimore Jewish Community Center. However, Jakir explained that this short drive takes people through about five minutes of cornfields, which gives Pearlstone the feel of being far away. Neely, the former Pearlstone Program Director, echoed this sentiment: “when you’re here, you don’t feel like you’re part of a city. You do feel like you’re fully engulfed in nature. We have great trails and woods and land to really feel away.” Jakir sees this distance and their location outside the city as one of the key elements that makes Pearlstone what it is.

And that is a priceless gift to us to be the innovator, the incubator, the experimental, the living laboratory for what Jewish life can be. And it’s subversive, and it’s hands on, and it’s young, and it’s earth based.”

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64 David Blank, Interview with author, Pearlstone Center Lounge, June 17, 2015.
65 Based on interviews with David Blank, Naomi Raphael and Neely Snyder.
66 Jakir Manela.
67 Neely Snyder.
68 Jakir Manela.
The location allows Pearlstone to be part of the greater Baltimore Jewish community and their identity as a different kind of Jewish space allows for some flexibility with their interpretation of Judaism. The first line of their mission statement is “The Pearlstone Retreat Center ignites Jewish passion.” 69 The mission at Pearlstone is to offer a Judaism that is experiential and exciting. The mission statement goes on to list the four core values that shape everything they do: warm hospitality, immersive experiences, living Judaism, and stewardship of the earth. 70 The farm is only part of how the staff at Pearlstone act as good stewards of the earth. Miriam, the Director of Community Sustainability helped Pearlstone to become a Maryland Green Center. 71 A geothermal heat pump helps decrease their energy use and the center uses energy efficient lighting. 72 They serve sustainable fair-trade food and recycle and compost. Miriam has also spread greening beyond the walls of Pearlstone. She has also worked with organizations and schools in the greater Baltimore Jewish community on their greening efforts. In much the same way, Pearlstone has become a location where the staff can experiment with Judaism and bring new, revitalized, and reimagined Jewish experiences to their surrounding community.

70 “Mission & History.”
72 “Mission & History.”
The program staff at Pearlstone works to reconnect Jews to the agricultural traditions that pervade Jewish texts and history. Neely pointed out that holidays are great occasions for Jews to rediscover their literal and figurative roots. She explained, “any holiday in [the Jewish] calendar has nature-based, land-based connecting points.” She went on to note that American Jews have lost touch with those connecting points and that often “they’ve become part of the history of the holiday as opposed to part of our current contemporary celebration.” Neely offered an example of how the staff at Pearlstone reimagines the celebration of Jewish holidays. Tu B’Shevat, the New Year for the Trees, provides most Jewish organizations with an opportunity to talk about the importance of trees and nature for the Jewish people. Many Jews plant trees, eat the fruit of trees and sing songs about trees to celebrate this holiday. In Neely’s words, the staff at Pearlstone “had to bump it up a notch.” The staff learned how to tap maple trees and turn the sap into maple syrup over an open flame in the Pearlstone fire pit. Then they created programs for families and other community groups to celebrate Tu B’Shevat through tree tapping. Neely stressed that these types of creative programs they offer at Pearlstone are not necessarily new, but rather they are “just reclaiming a connection that North American Jews have lost.” This experiential nature-based Judaism is epitomized in shmita, an entire year dedicated to stewardship and sustainability.

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73 Neely Snyder.
74 Neely Snyder.
75 Neely Snyder.
76 Neely Snyder.
5.5 Release

“How the hell did we get to a point that only professors and clergy get sabbaticals?” Jakir posed this provocative question in a phone conversation. Despite my current status as aspiring professor who will hopefully enjoy many sabbaticals in the years to come, I sympathized with his point. Shmita ensures that the land gets a year of rest, but what about the humans who work that land? When Jakir and his staff implemented shmita at Pearlstone, they ensured that the sabbatical would apply to the land, the animals, and the humans. Jakir explained that he “tried to bring sustainability, balance, not just environmental sustainability, but work life balance, workplace sustainability, organizational culture to the whole institution.” The farm staff worked towards environmental sustainability by using the year to deal with invasive species control and repairing and restoring the wooded areas that surround the farm. The leadership worked on a financial plan to carry them forward to the next shmita year and reimagined the role of the farm on the Pearlstone campus. And, in an effort to promote work-life balance, the entire staff was granted seven shmita days to rest and volunteer in the local community. The idea behind these initiatives was to revive all of Pearlstone and all who work, grow, and dwell there.

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77 Jakir Manela.
78 Jakir Manela.
5.5.1 Land & Animal Release and Land Restoration

Annual crops are usually grown on just under two acres of land at Pearlstone. The farm is not certified organic, but their methods are. Perennial crops are grown on just over two acres of land and include fruit orchards, herbs, asparagus, and mushrooms. There is a one acre animal pasture that usually houses 7 goats and almost 100 laying hens. The staff at Pearlstone learned about shmita, talked to other organizations, and brainstormed for about year to figure out what to do with their farm during the shmita year. About four months before shmita was set to start, when Jakir remembers them having “many ideas and very few plans,” he was approached by his Perennials Manager, Perri. She asked to work part time during the shmita year so she could work on restoring abandoned lots in Baltimore and told Jakir that they should do shmita “all the way” on the farm. After some quick planning, the staff decided to suspend the CSA and the apprenticeship for the year. Mira, a Program Associate told me that in accordance with the shmita principle related to animal care and letting animals roam free, the animal flock was cut down to four goats and eighteen hens. Naomi explained that they kept some animals because they have become part of Pearlstone’s identity in the Baltimore community. People come to Pearlstone to visit the goats and the hens, so some animals got to stay. Naomi also assured me that the animals were

80 “Our Farm.”
81 Jakir Manela.
82 Mira Menyuk, Interview with author, Pearlstone Center Lounge, June 18, 2015.
sold, not eaten. Changes were made in staffing to accommodate the changes to the animal pastures and the farm. This included hiring Greg, the Farm Director who came to Pearlstone in February 2015 and took charge of the agricultural aspects of shmita.

Greg estimated that 90% of the garden spaces on the farm are currently healing in an effort to achieve a maximum restoration that will ensure the success of the farm in future years. Greg points out that in all cases, Jewish or secular or industrial, agriculture is a product of more than just human planning.

We do the labor of organizing it and timing it to our satisfaction. But that’s not necessary for that plant to grow and be successful as an organism. So once you start trying to grow something, it occurs to you fairly early on that green thumbs are not that relevant.”

Human skills are only helpful in agriculture up to a point, then nature takes its course. Healthy soil has a lot to do with the success or failure of food production. Shmita, and the cover cropping that came with it, will allow the soil to rest and rebuild. Although the soil is at rest, the restoration occurring at Pearlstone means the farmers are hard at work. As Mira pointed out, “farmers don’t rest.”

I talked to Shelby, the Chesapeake Conservation Corps volunteer assigned to Pearlstone, as we hung lavender to dry that we had harvested a few days before. She explained that her work on the farm is divided into 20% programs, 30% on the farm, and

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83 Two hens later died because of fox and raccoon attacks so the flock stood at 16 in June 2015. Naomi Raphael, Interview with author, Pearlstone Staff Lounge, June 17, 2015.
84 Greg Strella.
85 Mira Menyuk.
50% restoration, which she said most interests her. She has done two major projects as part of her work on restoration. The first is restoring the riparian zone - a wooded stream side area at the boundary between the farm and the woods. We had worked in the riparian zone the day before, and that hot day spent doing hard labor was the reason we needed a relaxing afternoon task like hanging lavender indoors. Shelby, a group of volunteers from an Americorps program assigned to Pearlstone for the week, and I worked all day to clear out invasive species. The tasks included pruning thistles, removing honeysuckle that had overrun a hillside area, cutting back invasive vines from indigenous trees planted in the zone and keeping an eye on the spread of a parasitic species that Shelby tentatively identified as Japanese dodder. At the end of the day we were all scratched up, sunburned, and exhausted. A number of the volunteers reported back the next morning sporting inflamed red poison ivy rashes, but I heard very few complaints. A few minutes spent with Shelby was enough to convince me that battling invasive species is important work. She said that she feels “it’s a kind of ecological danger that people don’t pay as much attention to as they should, that there’s a real danger there and no one’s really doing anything about it, or not doing enough,

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86 Shelby Erwin, Interview with author, Pearlstone Farm Office, June 18, 2105.
87 Shelby clarified that an invasive species is not objectively bad. She defined an invasive as “a non-native plant, meaning it didn’t evolve here, that has the capacity to outcompete native plants and take over biodiversity.” (Shelby Erwin, Interview with author, Pearlstone Farm Office, June 18, 2015.)
These invasive species tend to out-compete native plants with throws off the balance of the local ecology.

Shelby’s second project was already complete when I arrived. She designed a model edible forest garden. She acquired permissions from the Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability and entered into a partnership with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay for the Trees. Bolstered by a mini-grant she was awarded by the Chesapeake Bay Trust, she was able to set up a beautiful garden that showcases Baltimore’s indigenous plants and tells their stories. The garden is also ecologically healthy and sustainable. Shelby explained that she set up the garden with “little pockets of polyculture where the tree was the nucleus and then there were things surrounding it.” As an example, she told me that they have had a problem with Japanese stiltgrass, an invasive grass that takes over and doesn’t let anything else grow and this has endangered their native pawpaw trees. So in Shelby’s garden, she set up the pawpaw with indigenous plants surrounding it.

So there’s a pawpaw in the middle and there could be some wild blue indigo, baptisia australis, that fixes nitrogen, which is a limiting factor in a lot of plants’ growth. And then there’s – I don’t know its common name, rudbeckia lacinia, a relative of black-eyed Susan, and that is actually a ground cover. So you plant that, and then it spreads out, and it can compete with the invasive stiltgrass.

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88 Shelby Erwin.
89 Shelby Erwin.
90 I asked Shelby why all the invasive species seem to be Japanese. She explained that Japan has a similar climate, so many Japanese plants that are introduced into Baltimore thrive.
91 Shelby Erwin.
Planting with a polyculture method, as shown in Shelby’s pawpaw example, renders the use of herbicides to fight invasive and fertilizers to add nitrogen unnecessary. And Shelby noted that this method is “just mirroring the way nature works, but kind of taking a hold of it.” All of these projects are part of Shelby’s work to offset something she’s been studying, the nature-agriculture continuum. She explained that with conventional agriculture, “you’re forcing nature to go in a direction that it doesn’t want to go, so you need to supplement those actions with an input of energy.” In conventional agriculture, humans have to intercede and put in labor time to deal with issues that nature has developed solutions to combat. Shelby is working to lessen the need for human energy input. The polyculture planting will mean less hot days spent battling invasive species in the future.

The goal of these projects is to identify and restore indigenous plants to Pearlstone’s property and remove as many invasive species as possible. This is work that is vital to the ecological restoration of their land. This is work that the farm staff has not had time to do during the CSA years when their days are spent caring for annual crops. The shmita year provided an opportunity for Pearlstone to repair some of the damage that they have done to their fields, and that the people who came before them had done to the surrounding wooded areas.

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92 Shelby Erwin.
5.5.2 Teaching Release and Community Outreach

A few parts of the farm, like the calendar garden and the greenhouse, are still being used for annual crops. Pearlstone has continued their education programs for school and camp groups this year. Neely explained that they approached creating shmita program in two ways. They created some new programs with shmita themes and then discussed how to frame their existing programs through the lens of shmita. Neely gave an example: “we do pickling workshops all the time, but to frame it as this is the shmita year, this is what that means, and why would preserving fresh vegetables be relevant or important in the shmita year?” So, this year they made the same pickles, but the education component focused on why preserving food is important during a shmita year. The staff also decided to hold Shmita Fest in June. Neely told me that the idea was to hold an event at the time of the year when the farm would usually be starting to produce. She thought it might be the time when the staff and visitors really started to feel something was missing.⁹³ For Shmita Fest, the staff set up canning and preservation workshops, art projects, an edible plant walk, a worm composting demonstration, text study, and the shmita simulation game.⁹⁴ The event was not well attended, but as with all things shmita, this was an experiment and the staff has six years to figure out how to

⁹³ Neely Snyder.
⁹⁴ Participant observation at Shmita Fest, Pearlstone Center, June 14, 2015.
rework Shmita Fest. The program staff also kept up their regular repertoire, so groups would have the option of choosing to just visit the animals or the orchard.95

Maintaining the regular programs is important because many of the groups that visit Pearlstone are not Jewish groups. They get many school groups from inner-city Baltimore. I asked Naomi how they explain shmita to non-Jewish groups.

We tell them that we’re taking a year off, just like on every seventh day God said we’re supposed to rest, every seventh year we’re also supposed to rest. That sort of context. I don’t know if they really get that this is a Jewish farm or what.”96

As Naomi notes, the religious identity of the farm seemed to play an especially interesting role this year. In other years, the farm looks like a farm, and perhaps the non-Jewish visiting groups are aware that the signage is Hebrew and the farm is at Jewish conference site, or maybe they just see a farm. But this year they saw a farm without vegetables and heard explanations about the land taking a sabbatical. The Jewish staff at Pearlstone had to figure out how to explain an obscure Jewish concept to non-Jews and the non-Jewish staff at Pearlstone learned enough about shmita to answer questions posed by curious visitors. Shelby said that no one sat her down as asked her to learn the rules of shmita, but that she had to understand some of the terminology so she had an answer when people asked if they could sign up for the CSA. Greg echoed the need to pick up some basic information about Judaism, but he found himself more drawn to the interpersonal aspects of the religion.

95 Neely Snyder.
96 Naomi Raphael.
center said “I sort of feel the way that Judaism influences people in their own way of living and relating to other people.” Pearlstone is a place where everyone seems very conscious about how they live and relate to other people at Pearlstone and beyond. The staff has brought shmita to the rest of the Baltimore Jewish community. Naomi and David worked with a religious school group that visited once a month and Naomi visits area preschools throughout the year. Through these programs they teach young Jews in Baltimore about the environment, sustainability, and shmita. Jakir taught a shmita session for the Jewish professional development agency in Baltimore and did shmita teaching with every agency CEO of the whole Baltimore Jewish Federation. The staff didn’t just bring shmita to Pearlstone, they brought it to Jewish Baltimore, and beyond. The shmita year offered the staff at Pearlstone, both Jewish and non-Jewish to learn about an ancient textual tradition and bring it to life in the twenty-first century as a model for how Jews should engage with their land and their community.

5.5.3 Human Release and Financial Restoration

In keeping with his belief that “everyone needs a sabbatical” and Pearlstone’s focus on community outreach, Jakir implemented shmita days for the staff at Pearlstone. They each got one extra vacation day and six additional days to use for community service. Jakir wanted “to give folks a few days to do something meaningful

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7 Jakir Manela.
to contribute to the broader community.” He and the staff mentioned that many people have not yet taken advantage of these days. However, Jakir said that some people have done great things and that the shmita days are something he plans to keep even when the shmita year ends. He mentioned that carrying the days forward and continuing to call them shmita days is in keeping with the Jewish traditions related to Shabbat: “just like you should bring Shabbat into the rest of the week, you should do the same with shmita and the rest of the years.” He thought the days might change a bit in structure and that they might try to organize one or two whole staff volunteer days in future years. The shmita days are an innovative way to allow staff to get some extra time away from their jobs, while also helping restore the community around them.

Shmita came at a good time for Pearlstone in many ways. Josh, the former Farm Director and current Farm to Table Specialist, told me that the farm had been struggling financially on a few levels leading up to shmita. He said that “it seemed like for the farm the timing would be kind of ideal, really true to the meaning of shmita.” Jakir suggested that responding to challenges like these are why shmita is important: “shmita is a useful and real rhythm that allows release of people, of land, of things that need to

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98 Jakir Manela.
99 Jakir Manela.
100 Josh Rosenstein, Interview with author, Pearlstone Center Kitchen, June 17, 2015.
be released.”101 Greg, who is not Jewish, expressed an admiration for the precedent that shmita set that allowed Pearlstone to take this year to rebuild.

There’s no way that you stop, basically, and focus on fundamentals for a year in the middle of your eighth year unless you have something that gives you some type of permission, like cultural currency to do that.102

The cultural precedence of shmita allowed the staff to take an indispensable break and it enabled them to move forward with a clear idea of where they were going. Josh added that shmita would allow them to “take a year to really bring in new people, do market research, [and] craft a farm business plan that was going to hold water financially.”103

Josh actually took time this year to step back from Pearlstone and start his own business, Edible Eden, which installs and maintains gardens for families, businesses and schools.104 As Josh stepped back, Greg stepped into the Farm Director role and he was working on a seven-year shmita cycle business plan when I was there in June that will guide the farm through to the next shmita year.105 According to both Greg and Jakir, the CSA will not be returning next year. Instead, Greg is working with Pearlstone’s Head Chef on a plan to bring more of the food from the farm into Pearlstone’s dining room. The apprenticeship is being redesigned into a short fellowship program that will return in 2016.

101 Jakir Manela.
102 Greg Strella.
103 Josh Rosenstein.
105 Greg Strella.
5.6 Conclusion

Shmita has been good for the land, the animals, and the people at Pearlstone. The staff tried a lot of new things. Some of them worked and some of them need retooling, but on the whole, the staff considers the year a success. In Greg’s words, “it’s quiet, we’re all hearing the birds, we’re all regaining our energy.” Jakir felt that the year “certainly resonated on the deep level of what is shmita supposed to mean, how is it supposed to feel and then what are you supposed to come out of it with.” He continued, “[a]griculturally it feels like very, very much an A+.” There is certainly potential in shmita for more innovation and restoration in the years to come. There are aspects of shmita that seem out of reach in a time when Jews and their foodways, social lives and finances are deeply entwined in American society. Neely addressed this: “It takes a community saying yes, we are all going to do this, because it doesn’t work if not everybody is doing it.” Without complete community participation, complete land and debt release are not possible. People would need to share food. They would need to agree that all debts would be released every seven years. They would need to work together to feed each other. In Neely’s words, “this whole structure has to move and shift.” Mira marveled at the power of some of these aspects of shmita that Pearlstone

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106 Greg Strella.
107 Jakir Manela.
108 Jakir Manela.
109 Neely Snyder.
110 Neely Snyder.
was not in the position to apply, like forgiving debt, “I think as an idea it’s great. Just imagining the way that would change society now is crazy.” Mira’s optimistic moment of reflection is what motivates movements like shmita. There is a deep sense, at Pearlstone and in the broader Jewish community, that the world is in need of repair. The food system received particular attention at places like Pearlstone that are structured, to some extent, as an alternative to industrial foodways. Josh described his feelings about the food system as they relate to kashrut.

Because...what feels like almost a central tenet of Judaism, this concept of kosherness, food that is pure, food that is fit to eat, juxtaposed with our planet-crushing, soul-crushing industrial food system and the political and financial systems that make it so incredibly dysfunctional and hypocritical. I feel that, as we say in Hebrew, al-bisari (על בשרי), in my flesh.¹¹¹

Josh feels that shmita is one of the Jewish concepts that can help realign kosher food with food that is sustainable. Jakir asserted that shmita is “certainly a deep values based response, voice, against or alternative to industrial food.”¹¹² Pearlstone, and the other organizations and individuals untied by the Shmita Project used the year to reimagine and reinvigorate shmita. They encouraged American Jews to consider an environmentally sustainable permaculture model and a diet based on ethical food production, consumption and food security. Pearlstone provided a model for the American Jewish community with their unprecedented agricultural observance of the shmita year in the Diaspora. Other organizations like the Jewish Farm School and

¹¹¹ Josh Rosenstein.
¹¹² Jakir Manela.
Adamah introduced Jewish Americans to shmita in other ways, through text studies focused on shmita, skill-acquisition workshops and creative innovations like Isabella Freedman’s shmita garden. The shmita movement remains small but this year’s experimental efforts hint at the potential of this movement. This analysis of shmita at Pearlstone provides a clear picture of one version of how this vision for a revitalized shmita practice is practical and possible in the American Jewish community and the extent to which this movement is a product of its location in the United States in the twenty-first century. However, since the true implementation of shmita requires an attention to the entire seven-year cycle, only time will reveal the potential power of shmita in America.
6. Compost: Final Thoughts on the Incidence and Implications of Religious Food Reform in the United States

“The stone which the builders rejected will become the chief corner-stone.”

(Psalms 118:22, JPS)

6.1 Introduction: “Feed Me”

Each morning after Avodat Lev, the service of the heart, the Adamah fellows do morning chores. During my second week at Adamah, I joined Rose and Debby for the compost chore. Rose enjoyed the chore and Debby hated it. It was the most physically challenging chore and the sights and smells that accompany compost make the chore one of the least desirable. However, the fellows rotate through all of the chores. So, each morning the three of us would put on our rain boots and head down to the area outside the Isabella Freedman kitchen around 7am. Inside an enclosed outdoor space, there were about fifteen bins filled with food waste and compostable tableware. The smell of food in various states of decay often overwhelmed us as we stepped into the area to gather bins. We would move four to six bins with a wooden pushcart. Some of the bins were so heavy it took two of us to lift them. The fellows in charge of the compost chore are supposed to take as many bins as they could push up the hill. The meager amount we had been managing was not ideal. As Debby and Rose struggled to push the bin-laden cart up Beebe Hill, they explained that the staff is also able to move the bins with trucks. I ended up assisting Arthur with the compost from the cultural center one morning and
it took the two of us about a quarter of the time with the aid of his pickup truck.

However, the compost chore is about more than moving compost from one place to another. It is about understanding compost. On foot, we faced the weight and the smells of the organic waste. We emptied the bins by hand onto the pile marked with a hand painted sign that read, “Feed Me!”

Figure 7: “Feed Me!” Pile, July 2015 (photo by author)

There were always four piles in the compost yard that sorted compost into varying states of decay. “Feed Me!” was the first pile, and was comprised of recognizable food waste. Some food items were still visible in the next pile, which was marked “Are we there yet?”
Figure 8: “Are we there yet?” Pile, July 2015 (photo by author)

Figure 9: “Still Cookin’” Pile, July 2015 (photo by author)

Figure 10: “The Good Stuff” Pile, July 2015 (photo by author)
Only compostable utensils were still visible in the third pile labeled “Still cookin.’” The final pile of dark and rich soil bore a sign that read “The good stuff…” Rose and I would stand on the “Feed Me!” pile, our boots sinking into the layers of waste below, as we dumped the bins onto the pile. Then we gathered wood chips from a pile at the edge of the compost area to cover the waste. The wood chips add carbon to the pile - a necessary ingredient for balanced soil. Meanwhile Debby would turn on the hose and begin washing out the empty bins. We could chat with Simcha, who was assigned to the chickens and worked alongside us opening the coop to let the chickens out and gathering the eggs they left behind. As we loaded the empty bins onto the carts and headed back down the hill, the chickens began their daily routine, which involved walking through the compost yard eating the food waste and donating their nitrogen-rich poop to the piles.¹

When I returned to the Isabella Freedman Retreat Center six months later, the same pile we fed with fresh food waste during those morning trips was now topped with the sign labeled “The Good Stuff.”²

¹ Participant Observation, Isabella Freedman Retreat Center Kitchen and Adamah Kaplan Family Farm, July 2015.
² Participant Observation, Adamah Kaplan Family Farm, December 2015.
Through a process called thermophilic composting the heat in the piles breaks the food waste down into forms more suitable for application onto soil. The result of this carefully regulated process is an ideal organic fertilizer. Put another way, composting is the process of bringing diverse waste materials together and transforming them into a valuable and usable product. In this way, compost provides an excellent metaphor for the subject of this dissertation.

Each chapter described a diverse group of people who, for various reasons, considered the food available on supermarket shelves inadequate and came together outside traditional institutional spaces to work together to grow, process, prepare, and consume edible food. At Adamah people with varied Jewish backgrounds gather to grow vegetables, care for animals, and learn more about Judaism’s agrarian history. The

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3 Adamah is a USDA Certified Organic Farm so they have to abide by USDA standards for compost. These standards require that the compost piles must maintain at a temperature between 131°F and 170°F for 3 days. The temperature of the piles is checked regularly at Adamah.
Hallelujah Diet appeals to Christians from many denominations who are seeking to improve their physical health by realigning their dietary habits with those they believe God intended for them. V. Mac Baldwin’s beef business thrives because he raises his cattle on grass and partners with Muslim and secular businesses to process and sell his product. The non-Jewish Farm Director at Pearlstone Center spends his time implementing ancient Jewish agricultural practices, like shmita, while the program staff develops programming to teach Baltimore Jews about agriculture and nature. In each of these instances food that is conceived of as “better” is produced and/or consumed as the result of a creative collaboration between people with diverse religiosities. The food is understood to be better for many reasons: it is organic, it is sustainable, it is humane, it is alive, it is nutrient rich, it tastes better. There are many communities and companies producing food that people consider better for these reasons and others. However, the foods described here are produced inside of a religious framework that alters the conceptualization of the foods. The foods produced by Adamah, the Hallelujah Diet, Baldwin Family Farms, and Pearlstone Center are organic, sustainable, humane, alive, nutrient rich, and delicious, but they also acquire sacrality as a result of their production and consumption within religious systems.

This concluding chapter will address the themes that connect the sites discussed in the preceding chapters. The main points of connection were described in the first chapter. The case studies showed how religious people have responded to what they
perceive to be injustices within the American industrial food system outside traditional religious institutions through partnerships with co-religionists, people from other religious groups, and people with no religious affiliation at all. This argument, which shaped the dissertation up to this point, focuses on the people involved in the production of food. In this concluding chapter I would like to reflect on the role of food in religion using the example of religious food reformers. In the first section I will address approaches to the conceptualization of food among religious food reformers. In turning their religious attention to food, the reformers described here approach food, often situated solidly within the realm of the profane, and through their attention to its production and preparation, by moving food towards (or back towards) the realm of the sacred. The second section contains a discussion of the role of religious food reformers in the United States. This movement has waxed and waned over the last two hundred years, but in the current moment it is growing with no indication of slowing down any time soon. I will end the chapter by returning to the titular concept. What are the foods that are sustaining these religious food reformers as they wander through the deserts of the American food system? The list of individual foods is long, but the common categories that emerge point to the directions that may come to define this movement in the future.
6.2 Food as Sacred: “Are we there yet?”

The anthropologist Mary Douglas famously theorized that all societies in the world share a central concern for purity. She argues that people are especially prone to separate the clean from the unclean in sacred spaces. For this reason, she turns to Leviticus and considers the dietary restrictions contained therein. These restrictions were originally intended to ensure that only pure foods were offered to the God of the Israelites. After the fall of the Second Temple, the rabbis transformed the biblical laws into the system of kashrut. The rabbis agonized over the details of what foods were kosher (“fit to eat”) and what foods were not. For almost two thousand years, the Jewish people adhered to the dietary restrictions the rabbis outlined in the early centuries of the common era. Meanwhile, their Christian counterparts dismissed kashrut along with the rest of the Old Testament rules and regulations. In Christianity most foods moved outside the realm of the sacred. In the nineteenth century, the rise of Reform Judaism brought with it a resistance to kashrut. While Orthodox and other halakhically observant Jews contributed to the rise of the kosher industry in the United States, their liberal Jewish counterparts most often eschewed kashrut. As American food became increasingly industrialized in the twentieth century, most Americans considered food to

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4 Douglas, Purity and Danger.
5 There are exceptions. Ritual foods, especially those used in communion, still require an attention to purity.
be a mundane and necessary aspect of their daily lives. Religious food reformers
represent a multi-faceted effort to re-sacralize food.

The farmers and dieters described are approaching food with the basic
assumption that most of the food available for purchase in the United States is unclean. They propose different reasons for the status of this food. At Adamah and Pearlstone
they are deeply concerned with the environmental degradation caused by industrial
monoculture farming, increased use of pesticides, and the alienation of American Jews
from nature. They work to repair the land, grow produce using sustainable and organic
methods, and educate Jews of all ages and denominations about the agrarian context of
the Bible and modern agriculture. Their teaching materials and programs are not about
kashrut as such, but they do encourage American Jews to think about what foods are fit
to eat in the twenty first century. V. Mac Baldwin and George Malkmus, author of The
Hallelujah Diet, both consider the human body as a sacred entity created by God that
functions better on foods consumed close to their natural state. V. Mac raises his cows
on grass so the final beef products are filled with the Omega-3s that human bodies need
to thrive. Hallelujah dieters eat their vegetables and fruits raw and use juicing to ensure
that they are ingesting the maximum amount of vitamins and minerals. In each of these
cases, the foods that are considered “clean” are being redefined in accordance with
specific ideologies and theologies. For those discussed here, food is being reconsidered
within the realm of the sacred. There is an underlying assumption that the land, plants,
animals, and humans were created by God and an attention to the relationships between these living entities is required to ensure the health and survival of them all.

The humans at each site are re-conceptualizing their place in the world in relation to the animals and plants that they depend on for survival. They see themselves as one piece of an entanglement of living things. The preceding chapters were only nominally about food. Rather, the communities described here are attending to food-in-process. They are growing cucumbers and cows. They are eating raw living foods and giving the land a Sabbath. They are rethinking their humanity in light of their relationship with the plants and animals they eat and the land that houses them all.

There is an underlying assumption that the current methods of food production, especially factory farming and industrial monoculture farming, are unsustainable. Adamah and Pearlstone were set up to address environmental sustainability. At these sites, humans grow food in ways that perpetuate and even benefit soil health. This attention to the land will allow them to continue growing food well into the future. The Hallelujah Diet helps people adopt a diet that will sustain their bodily health. At Baldwin Family Farms V. Mac works hard to revitalize farmland and sustain its status as for eternity. In the process, he sells beef that provides human bodies with essential nutrients that will ensure they are also sustained. At each of these sites concerns for environmental sustainability are considered alongside efforts to sustain human bodies. The bodies and land sustained are attributed sacred qualities in the language and
literature of these communities. This sacralization is bolstered by close readings of Biblical sources that describe communities much their own that were also entangled in the natural world and adjusted their practices and principles in recognition of that fact.

The re-sacralization of food is by no means complete, even at the farms and diet center I visited. The culture of food production and consumption is changing. Individuals and communities are encouraging people to approach food with new eyes and at the sites I visited, people are able to experience food differently. They learn more about how it is grown, the time it takes to cook a meal from scratch, and what beef tastes like when it comes from a cow that only ate grass. But it is unlikely that even the most enthusiastic visitors to these sites will change their diets completely forever. Americans are used to food being convenient, quick, and cheap. The foods produced by the reformers that populate this book rarely fall into these categories. For example, as discussed in chapter three, juicing is an expensive and time-consuming process. However, the fact that these reforms are unlikely to be adopted wholly does not diminish their importance. They are asking people to reconnect with their food and consider where it comes from. They are urging Americans to demand food that is sustainable, humane, and organic. They are encouraging their co-religionists to eat minimally processed foods. And these four groups are just a sampling of a myriad of religious food reform groups, organizations, and movements in the United States. The
lines between clean and unclean are blurry in the present moment, and the religious food reformers are working daily to remind people of that fact.

### 6.3 American Religious Food Reform Movement: “Still Cookin’”

The sign that adorns the gate to the compost yard at Adamah contains a verse from Psalms: “The stone which the builders rejected will become the chief cornerstone.”

![Sign on the Compost Yard Gate, July 2015 (photo by author)](image)

In the compost yard, food scraps are turned into compost, an invaluable product for organic farms like Adamah. However, composting takes time. Food breaks down slowly even in optimal condition. The process requires the efforts of humans, chickens, and microorganisms. It takes a long time before the pile begins to look like a cohesive whole, instead of an amalgamation of apple cores, compostable forks, weeds, leaves, and chicken poop. At the moment, the American religious food reform movement is diffuse

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7 Ps. 118:22 JPS

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and the title is one I applied to a distinct set of organizations, rather than constituting an indigenous moniker that these groups chose for themselves. In the time that I have spent studying religious food reform, the movement grew exponentially. When I first visited Adamah and Pearlstone, there were only a couple other Jewish farms. A recent search revealed that there are now fifteen, spread all across the country. A restaurant recently opened up near my home that sells mostly raw vegan food that would please Hallelujah dieters. The demand for Baldwin Beef keeps V. Mac and his staff busy clearing more land so they can grow more grass and feed more cows. These religious people were motivated by their religious beliefs and principles to produce and consume different foods, and they set up new spaces to do so. And, much like the free-range label I used to categorize their work, their efforts are reaching a broader audience every day.

When I began this research five years ago, I was greeted by blank or quizzical stares when I explained my project. Now food studies is an expanding area within religious studies. This spring as I finalized the dissertation, I had to forgo not one but two different conferences on food and religion. Food justice as a broader movement addresses concerns I was not able to discuss in this project. Climate change has most recently captured the attention of religious people, most notably Pope Francis who dedicated an encyclical to the topic.8 Other areas of religious activism that are directly related to food production and consumption include industrial agriculture, animal

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welfare, food insecurity, migrant labor, and land sovereignty. This dissertation touched on just four examples of an ever-expanding web of reformers who are concerned about the food we eat and want to change the system and create new options. There is more work to be done. This burgeoning movement requires sustained scholarly attention.

Having studied the religious character of the food system stretching from farms to stores, I hope that other scholars will step outside the bounds of institutional religion and follow religion to all the places that it goes. Religion in the United States is a dynamic phenomenon and there is a wealth of research material betwixt and between denominational doorposts. The examples here show that Jewish farms, Christian diets, and Christian farms are all more complicated than they appear to be on the surface. What we are left with in the end are farms and diets that are populated and followed by diverse groups of religious and non-religious people. Their collaborative efforts created products that are not easy to categorize, but that does not mean they are not worth studying. If religious activities and people are difficult to categorize, it is time to rethink the categories. This dissertation was not about Jewish food or Christian food. Food was simply the lens I used to investigate a vast entanglement of people, animals, plants, land, and the religious ideals that bring them all together.

6.4 American Manna: “The Good Stuff”

The text of the Hebrew Bible does not specify what the manna that sustained the Israelites in the desert was. The manna of this dissertation was similarly illusive by
virtue of its wide variation. At Adamah, it was organic produce prepared on site and consumed after a hard days work in the fields. During the Hallelujah Diet Health Retreat we were sustained by Barley Max, a precise blend of green juice and carrot juice, and meals that were 80% raw. Baldwin Family Farms sells meat that was resulted from a partnership between a Christian farmer, his God, a Muslim meat processor, and American capitalism. And on a sunny Sunday at Pearlstone guests were treated to snacks plucked directly off the trees on a perennial plant tour. The definition of manna is in the eyes of the beholder, and the one to whom they are beholden. With no end to the American industrial food “desert” in sight, the manna will continue to appear as religious people react to the system and work to change it. Religious people are going to keep setting down their forks to pick up hoes, picket signs, and their checkbooks in an effort to awaken Americans to the injustices in the system and encourage change. There are endless opportunities to study religion as it is enacted within this movement. Luckily, the manna is plentiful and if all goes according to the visions of the reformers, it will one day sustain us all.
References

Fieldwork


Bibliography


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**Biography**

Adrienne Krone was born December 30, 1982 in Buffalo, New York. She graduated from Stony Brook University in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. She completed the Mekhina program at the Union for Traditional Judaism in 2006. Adrienne earned a Master of Arts in Religion from Duke University in 2011. She completed a Ph.D. at Duke University in the Graduate Program in Religious in the spring of 2016. She published “‘A Shmita Manifesto’: A Radical Sabbatical Approach to Jewish Food Reform in the United States” in *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* in 2015. She was a recipient of the Nathan J. Perilman Fellowship in Judaic Studies 2013-2016, the Perilman Summer Stipend 2013-2015, and the Gurney Harris Kearns Summer Research Fellowship in 2012. In 2016, Adrienne accepted a position as assistant professor of religious studies and director of Jewish life at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania.