

Public History and the Food System: Adding the Missing Ingredient

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Introduction: History as the Missing Ingredient

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Practicing history helps to cultivate a long perspective. It can be a counterbalance to claims that things have never been this bad before, that a given situation is unprecedented, that the entire future is at stake—for a culture, a nation, humanity or the planet itself—if some particular course of action is not taken immediately. Explorers of history tend to gain a sense of the human past and present as a long series of adaptations, course-corrections, unintended consequences, complex encounters and equally complex compromises, in which occasional outright disasters and dramatic shifts are the exception rather than the rule, and in which predictions of doom have a cyclical history of their own. These are habits of mind that favor slowness, careful reflection, and a reluctance to jump onto bandwagons, qualities that can be extremely valuable in thinking through any pressing challenge.

We are true believers in those values. So we're aware of the irony of starting this book by talking about the unique urgency of the present moment. Our hope is that we can create a framework for bringing together these seemingly incompatible things—the long, slow perspective of history and the pressing need to act—and to show why food is an exceptional vehicle for bridging the gap between them.

First, the sense of urgency. In a nutshell, we are motivated by the rapidly changing climate and humans' role in accelerating those changes. We share the increasingly widespread sense that the window of opportunity for addressing some of the most obvious contributing causes—primarily our still-expanding fossil fuel dependency and related issues like greenhouse gas emissions and the vulnerabilities inherent in the extremely large-scale systems and supply chains enabled by petroleum—is already closing or perhaps has closed, leaving human societies with a set of challenges that will require adaptability and collective wisdom in the coming decades. There is beginning to be a good deal of discussion around the museum and public history fields about these issues, in some cases as part of the projects that will be mentioned in the chapters and interviews in this book. But we believe that in general, these fields have not fully settled into a set of roles that can channel their distinctive and valuable contributions into the work being done to understand and respond to climate change and all that connects to it. To use the food metaphor that inspires our title, a nuanced sense of history has too often been the “missing ingredient” in the richly bubbling stew of climate change discussion and action.

This book works to show what that reconfigured role might look like. It offers tools for reshaping food interpretation, bringing it into dialogue with other contemporary efforts to rethink and reshape food systems—and, by extension, systems that provide other kinds of vital resources to our communities. This introductory chapter sets out a rationale for seeing this kind of work not as a distraction or an add-on to what museums and public

history already do, but as squarely within the mandate to serve as a mode of public service and education in a democratic society. Before exploring those questions of mission and values, however, we need to clarify why we have chosen food—out of all the possible arenas where problems of resource use and community resilience are being tackled—as our starting point.

Why start with food?

When we think about the cluster of issues linked with climate change and the extraction of finite planetary resources--energy use, wealth disparities, environmental degradation, and more--it doesn't take long to become daunted and discouraged. There are dedicated people around the world working directly on those issues, but the majority of us are not full-time activists or policy-makers. Those who want to do more to connect their everyday lives and work with these big projects need points of entry where they can envision and create change without becoming instantly overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of the interlinked problems. For the authors of this book (see sidebars), as for many other people, food provides that entry point.

Food is accessible. It is immediate and familiar. It is universal, in the sense that all humans must eat to stay alive; yet at the same time, it's richly specific in its cultural, regional, and personal variations. With its intimate ties to sense of place, memory, and identity, it forges links—ages between culture and biology, past and present, small and large scales, the personal and the political. These links are often deeply felt, helping to work against the distances and abstractions created by enormous systems and problems.

Because food is tied so closely to our everyday choices and our very survival, people feel empowered to act on food issues. Those actions are often expressed on an individual level: a change in shopping or cooking habits, starting a home garden, seeking out more information about what's in our food and where it came from. But concern about food just as often manifests in unexpected convergences between the personal and the collective. Such flashpoints have a long history. Parisian women who marched on Versailles in 1789 in response to the high price of bread are part of the same lineage as the food protests around the Middle East that were a key component of the “Arab Spring” movement in 2011. And the public outcry that followed Upton Sinclair's 1906 exposé of the Chicago meat-packing industry in *The Jungle* prefigured later controversies over pesticide use and pollution from agricultural waste.¹

Many factors have contributed to popularity of locally produced food in the U.S. over the past decade: the search for novel culinary experiences, the marketing of both rural and urban places as destinations for travel and consumption, and a cyclical return of anti-modern sentiments, all of which also have their own long histories. But we believe that at bottom, the contemporary local food movement is driven by widespread and growing concern about how to live in ways that rely less on large-scale and fossil-fuel-dependent systems. We see this not as a momentary trend, but as a sign of increasing public willingness to confront the costs and consequences of our modern industrial food system—and, by extension, our modern industrial society as a whole. The attempt to eat more locally is by no means a blanket solution to anything. But there *are* no blanket solutions to this cluster of problems; there are only points of engagement and—at best—a

slow movement toward clearer shared understandings and more intentional collective actions. Sourcing more of our food at a local farmers' market does not change the world, but it reflects an openness to grappling with some of the realities of making changes in both our individual lives and the larger systems that support us, and can create meaningful local impact. Just as food provides many people with an accessible starting point for trying to live in less energy-dense, more just, and more locally-oriented ways, we see the contemporary focus on food as an opportunity for the history field to connect directly with vital public processes and discussions in ways that are fully in keeping with the core purposes we seek to serve.

Arguing that food should take a more central role in historical presentation may seem strange to some who see it as already there. After all, don't most living history sites and villages have a hearth fire going somewhere, with a costumed interpreter browning corn cakes on a griddle? What about the oral history projects that explore the role of food and farming in ethnic and rural communities? Don't most house-museum installations feature a tea service, a dough trencher, or some other object representing the presence of food in daily life? It's true that food has long been a component of historic interpretation, particularly at living history sites, historic houses, and farm museums, where visitors expect to see a rich and full depiction of the activities of daily life in a setting representing the past. As we discuss in Chapter One, food history interpretation has antecedents in the earliest historic preservation projects; over the ensuing decades, museums and historic sites have continued to develop depth and breadth in food topics. Today, many public history organizations present one or more common modes of food

interpretation: cooking demonstrations, gardening or farming demonstrations, tastings, talks, or classes and workshops. Through years of cumulative research and practice, foodways interpreters in museum settings have developed forms of knowledge newly valuable to contemporary Americans.

But interpreting food *in* history is not quite the same thing as interpreting the history *of* food. History organizations, broadly speaking, have been slow to connect their carefully developed content knowledge to the current groundswell of interest in contemporary food politics, generally being content to tweak existing programs to highlight overlaps with the local food movement. Standard presentations of food in most museums and historic sites ~~is~~ are still narrowly confined within an illustrative mode of period interpretation that we think of as the “butter churn” approach—“This is how people used to make butter—here, take a turn and try it yourself.” Such demonstrations are engaging, often memorable, and certainly not irrelevant in terms of helping audiences gain a clearer awareness of food production labor or of the convenience and variety they experience within modern industrial food systems. But such narrow presentations stop short of offering a space for people to formulate larger questions about those systems. It’s easy for a museum-goer to walk away from such demonstrations having only confirmed the nostalgic impressions circulating in media and pop culture, or projected their incomplete understandings onto a complicated past, instead of engaging in the reflective inquiry that good interpretation aims to present. In this simple, demonstrative approach, visitors may not perceive that the past included many of the same complex dimensions of food discussions we’re familiar with in the present-day world—questions about economics and inequality, public health,

quality and safety, supply chains and trade networks. The perennial complexity of food-related issues is too often squashed or omitted, creating a puzzling gap between an apparently simple past and a contemporary world of seemingly unprecedented difficulty.

Where food interpretation *is* connected to contemporary or political questions, it is often presented as a “hook” designed to redirect audience members’ attention to interpretive messages deemed more significant and weighty.² There is a tendency to think of food as inherently lightweight—isn’t that part of its friendly appeal, and the reason it’s useful in easing into more difficult topics? We are advocating a trickier balance: making use of that appeal but refusing to change the subject. We see food as a starting point, but not just to transition into more serious matters or “real” history. It is a starting point for unpacking the rich, complex, confusing, daunting, and ultimately empowering stories inherent in food itself. Food is not merely a topic along the way to interpreting more consequential questions; food itself *contains* those questions, while offering an exceptionally accessible point of entry into them. We need to start with food, and then *stay* there long enough to do that difficult work of unpacking its import.

This is work that requires the tools of the community organizer as well as the archival researcher and public educator. Expanding that toolkit is one of the biggest challenges for museums and history organizations that aim for a deeper interpretation of food topics. But the potential results are exciting and important, fitting squarely within contemporary ideas about expanded civic roles for museums and historic sites. Reframing food interpretation within broader questions and knotty problems at the personal, regional, and

national levels, past and present, we can convene a conversation of variety and sophistication, helping to position historical institutions and projects as centers of learning and discourse on issues central to the lives of our audiences and communities.

Food, mission, and values

There are good reasons why people involved in interpreting history have been reluctant to enter the realm of contemporary debate too directly. In intensely politicized arenas like the discussion of climate change, historians—like scientists—are rightly leery of having their careful, provisional knowledge distorted by partisan maneuvering or over-simplified by audiences unfamiliar with the deeper debate. Institutional missions and contexts may not seem to support attention to climate-, environmental-, and social justice-related issues, while interpreters' and historians' specific skills and expertise may not always seem directly applicable either. Audiences may well prefer familiar and comforting food interpretation that emphasizes old-fashioned skills like hearth cooking and nostalgic agrarian landscapes rather than the often-grittier realities of day-to-day food production and all that it connects to. Both interpreters and audiences may see food issues a low priority, compared with interpreting other pressing histories of social justice, such as racism, violence, or access to education. And in a scenario where radical changes in climate prompt mass upheavals and-disruptive weather events unprecedented in known human experience, is the record of the past even relevant at all?

But there are as many good reasons why we should overcome our professional and institutional reluctance to act. We know that history is not a direct guide to the future, but

it is a crucial tool for understanding how we arrived at the problems of the present -- a key task as people grope toward some kind of shared analysis and attempt to address those problems. And despite the continued appeal of nostalgic and aesthetically pleasing food presentations and landscapes, people in our audiences and communities are increasingly aware of the ferment of policy and ethical questions surrounding food at present. They are reading the work of writers like Michael Pollan, watching food-related documentaries like “Supersize Me” and “Food, Inc.”, and thinking about food safety and the implications of labeling (or not labeling) genetically engineered food or countries of origin. They are recognizing profound racial and economic inequalities in food distribution, food quality, and food labor, and are working toward solutions. Members of the Millennial generation, in particular, care deeply about food. They opt for organic and ethically-produced food more often, cook from fresh ingredients more regularly rather than using packaged foods, and favor small, independent providers when possible.³ As the existing and impending effects of the changing climate loom larger, more people are connecting the dots among food, climate issues, and questions about sharing and using resources in general. There are fewer things that seem truly separate from this big cluster of questions and more and more reasons to become actively engaged in them as interpreters, educators, stewards, citizens, and members of our own communities.

Those who practice history in public, whether in museums, historical organizations, government agencies, or other settings, are generally motivated by a sense that historical knowledge is an essential foundation for good critical thinking and civic decision-making. This motivation makes itself felt in the ongoing shift of museum and public

history work toward civic engagement and participation around a wide range of issues. Yet many historical institutions and organizations are also struggling to stay afloat financially and to articulate a strong rationale for why this work should be supported in a crowded and competitive cultural marketplace and a time of shrinking budgets. Another answer to the question “Why start with food?” is that a new approach to food interpretation can help us to make that strong case for our own relevance.

Museums, and history museums in particular, openly acknowledge that over the past two decades they have found themselves facing a set of related and intensifying crises: of finances, of attendance, and most painfully, of relevance. Where the bicentennial fever of the 1970s made history museums hip, in more recent years a stagnation of strategies and lack of audience cultivation has threatened to render history museums a cultural sidelight. Outdoor museums seem appropriate perhaps for families with young children and school groups, while historic house museums have become the haunt of older heritage tourists. In both cases, the majority of museum participants are white, educated, and relatively affluent.⁴ Museum leaders, analyzing the trajectory of demographic change, caution that continuing to serve only the audiences who have traditionally visited is a recipe for shrinking attendance and revenue, as those narrow segments of the population become proportionally smaller within the larger trajectory of demographic change, as well as a prescription for social irrelevance. At conferences and in boardrooms, museum professionals agonize over this public disaffection, searching for underlying reasons in factors ranging from the lower cost of travel to competition from online entertainment, implicit biases and unacknowledged cultural barriers, poor-quality history teaching, or a

cutthroat funding environment that favors STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and health-related charitable efforts above the humanities.

Some observers posit that the 20-year juggernaut of attendance decline reflects a cultural break in which younger generations are simply bored by the passive formats of the past, demanding instead high theatricality and the chance to be at the center of the action, personalizing events and influencing outcomes. But an equally powerful demand of contemporary audiences is a stronger sense of connection to a meaningful narrative larger than themselves--a moving and creative response to the distraction and alienation that comes with immersion in a 24/7 beeping, pinging, image-driven and status-conscious digital and social environment. Food, which brings pleasure, facilitates family and cultural memory, connects people through exchange, and anchors celebrations, can provide one such grounding narrative. Rarely has that narrative been sufficiently highlighted in museums to capture the potential audience's attention, yet indicators are that a ready audience awaits.⁵ People are already seeking links between food's past and present. Museums willing to address themselves directly to these wide audiences, creating meaningful places to inhabit both massively-scaled and intimate personal narratives, can reach new participants and draw them into closer, more sustaining relationships with institutions they find authentically valuable.

Food interpretation as a work in progress

This book is intended to address both "how to" and "why to" reshape food interpretation in dialogue with civic questions and processes. But food is extremely dynamic as both a

topic for exploration and an arena of action. And that means that between the “why” and the “how,” there is a good deal of territory whose outlines are only just beginning to come into focus. Between the time we submitted the proposal for this book and the time we finished writing, a lot of things in the “eat local” movement had changed, and they will change again by the time the book reaches your hands. This moving-target quality can be difficult for practitioners who are used to more stable kinds of content or outcomes. We know that our understandings of the past are continually in motion, but at least the materials we work with tend to stay still long enough for us to contemplate them in order to create some kind of settled interpretive product. The same is not necessarily true with the kind of food interpretation we are advocating here. This is both its great strength—it offers opportunities to engage directly with vital public and civic processes—and its biggest challenge, suggesting the need for a deep cultural shift in the way historic site interpretation tends to work. Embracing that challenge requires thinking about this work as a long, ongoing, uneven, sometimes unruly process that takes place on many levels—in our local communities and societies writ large, in our institutional and organizational settings, and also within ourselves.

At present, the network of public historians engaged in new forms of food and farming interpretation is improvisational, decentralized, and inquisitive, working in hybridized ways that draw on vocabularies well outside of museum-like institutions, iterating and redesigning with each new initiative. There are few fixed models here, and a good deal of experimentation and speculation, tacking back and forth between tried-and-true techniques and a sense of operating exploratively in areas not yet fully defined. Many

organizations, perhaps unsure whether interest in food is another passing fad, are stuck in a form of analysis paralysis, wanting to study the phenomenon from every angle before carving out a narrow spot in the interpretive program for a workshop here or an update to the daily program there. But a few institutions have adopted a bold experimental mode, embracing food communities with an admirable nimbleness and energy. In this book, we have tried to reflect their work, particularly in the interviews featured under the heading “Work in Progress.” Those segments, as well as the author sidebars included in this chapter, give some sense of how this work looks and feels to practitioners in a variety of settings where the interpretation of food history intersects with public engagement around present-day food issues. Their pilot projects and experimental strategies may yet become the basis for solid long-range commitments to embed historical explorations of food issues in core offerings, rather than tacking on one-off projects in a concession to the zeitgeist.

The “process” quality of this mode of food interpretation extends into the language we use, and it is worth adding a note about terminology here. One thing that quickly becomes clear when we begin to explore the history of food is that even the most basic terms are freighted with particular perceptions, tastes, and associations, often conflicting, confusing, and shot through with differences and inequalities of many kinds. One person’s “junk food” is another person’s “affordable meal”; a “culturally-appropriate” food for some may violate definitions of what is healthful or “sustainable” for others. Terminology around farming seems particularly unstable: what constitutes a “conventional” farm, an “industrial” one, a “family farm,” an “organic” or “sustainable”

one, or indeed a “farm” at all? Who is the “farmer” on a farm where most of the actual work of growing food is done by machines and migrant laborers?

In fact, the very words “farm” and “farmer” tend to stand in for a bevy of specialized food producers who don’t all work with foods that grow directly out of the ground.⁶ At times in this book, we will also use the same convenient shorthand, allowing “farm” and “farming” to take in the full range of providers that fill our plates, including orchardists, foragers, ranchers, sugarmakers, beekeepers, fishermen, aquaculturists, and others, and primary processors like vintners, cheesemakers, brewers, bakers and butchers.⁷ Official and certified definitions are often at odds with vernacular ones or with actual practices and methods (for example, many small farms choose to use organic methods but do not adopt organic certification because of the additional costs and work involved).

“Localness,” as discussed in Chapter Four, also proves surprisingly difficult to pin down, appearing more as an open question than a distinct characteristic. Nor do the boundaries stop at “food” itself. One of the ideas being shared around the food movement at present is that we need to think much more broadly about our food sources and the systems that support them, not only to encompass non-agricultural modes like fishing, permaculture, and foraging, but also to consider land and resource use more generally as integral parts of our food systems. Water is perhaps the most crucial element of this kind of expansive view of our resource base, one that is assuming greater and greater prominence in public thinking as aquifers shrink, rivers flood, fertile regions become arid and vice versa, and oceans rise in erratic ways all around the globe. Water issues obviously overlap with--but

also go far beyond--food issues *per se*. Where, then, does “food” begin and end? Or does it?

The slipperiness of these terms makes itself felt throughout the chapters that follow. Anyone moving into a more engaged food interpretation will need to contend with that slipperiness to at least some extent. Our discussions throughout this book shift between talking about *farming* and talking about *food* writ large; sometimes it is simpler to do so than to stop and dig into the question (admittedly a historically important one) of why we tend to be so fixated on agriculture to the exclusion of other kinds of subsistence and sustenance. The good news is that this instability in language actually opens avenues for investigation and interpretation. (Why does one state define a family farm differently from a neighboring state? Where and when did the family farm become such an iconic and taken-for-granted feature of the agricultural landscape?) And the better news is that we are not alone in wrestling with these old and new definitions. This is a core task for most people within the food movement, and our willingness to do so alongside them—with the historical insights that we can bring to the endeavor—can create immediate openings for conversation and engagement. The chapters that follow are intended both to expand the rationale for a more civically engaged food interpretation and to provide some tools for putting these ideas into practice.

Ways to use this book

The complexities of food mean that every reader of this book is likely to come to it with a unique set of goals, questions, and experiences. We have designed the book to be useful

in a number of ways to public historians and museum interpretation teams as well as potentially to food producers and their supporters. We have tried to envision a complete toolkit for practitioners working on a truly engaged interpretation of food, and we realize that some readers will already be well on their way to building that toolkit.

We suggest strongly that you spend time with Chapter One's discussion about the importance of reflexive practice, as well as the core interpretive framework--what we're calling the "triple top line"--outlined in Chapter Three. But beyond that, different readers will likely find different paths through the book. Some may want to read it from beginning to end, but others may want to dip into particular sections and just skim others or note them for later. Some of the chapters may serve as "think pieces" for those who are still in the process of reflecting on the role that food interpretation plays at their institutions or their own relationship to food history and the present-day food movement. Specific segments of the book might be useful as readings to share as part of discussions in planning and training, or as an introduction for allies and partners who are approaching food-related projects from quite different perspectives. Brief bibliographical essays at the end of chapters point to the key sources that have informed our arguments, as well as offering suggestions for further reading on key topics.

We've also included a timeline that weaves together the various histories we trace in the book—environmental and technological change, energy use, food interpretation, policy, food production and consumption themselves—as a framework for building the kind of triple top-line narrative we're advocating. We hope readers will find ways to plug their

own key events into this timeline, and that it may help illuminate some of the moments of change—and the potential for asking new questions—within local and regional stories. All of these pieces fit together, but not every reader may need all of them, or need them at present. Our hope is that the book will offer a range of ideas and materials and that it may serve as a reference, an inspiration, and a challenge. The fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach is part of our point: productive modes of engaged food interpretation will emerge from unique places and relationships. This book aims to support individual efforts to develop those unique practices.

The first of the three sections takes a step back from the actual materials of food history and makes a case for a more reflexive practice of interpreting food. As we have already noted, there is no shortage of food interpretation in the museum and public history world. What is in short supply is a willingness to take a really hard look at our own positions as public historians working within our social, political, economic, organizational and cultural settings. The concept of reflexive practice has gained more currency as these fields have matured and developed a clearer sense of their own lineages. But it is still a difficult idea to put into practice, especially when approaching the line that separates educational, preservationist, and usually not-for-profit work from “real world” food systems and economies. In order to approach that line thoughtfully and effectively, practitioners need to be aware of where it is and where they stand in relation to it.

To that end, Section I explores two key contexts for food interpretation. The first, in Chapter One, is a brief genealogy of food interpretation itself. We examine some of the

different origin points and modes of presenting food as they emerged over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the historic preservation movement, industrial exhibitions, domestic science, and model farms and food tourism. In Chapter Two, we shift to the contemporary landscape with an overview of the varied and dynamic “food movement”—a term that incorporates an enormous range of people and projects all the way from boutique gastronomy to radical social-justice advocacy. Taken together, the two chapters are designed to broaden interpreters’ sense of themselves as inheritors of a particular set of conventions as well as potential participants in a lively and complex present-day field of action. “Work in Progress” interviews with Darwin Kelsey, a pioneer of the living history museum movement of the 1960s and 70s, and Severine von Tschärner Fleming, advocate and organizer for today’s young and beginning farmers, help to deepen a sense of how people in different locations in both the history realm and the food movement are continuing to build on the surprisingly long lineage of experimenting with food history for civic purposes.

Section II delves into some areas of content expertise that may be useful in reshaping food interpretation. Chapter Three “The Triple Top Line: A Different Way to Think about Food and Farm History,” argues that most of what we think we know about food history is not wrong, but it *is* distorted by a “winner’s version” of how our present-day food systems came to be. Playing on the idea, current in social enterprise, of the “triple bottom line” that values the ecological and social impacts of business as well as financial ones, we suggest a more critical way to approach food histories. Our triple top-line narrative begins with big questions about particular kinds of environmental relationships,

economic imperatives, and energy sources, particularly, “What happens when a finite set of environmental resources meets an economic system based on endless growth and an energy source that seems to promise that growth?” Chapter Three also foregrounds the issue of scale and discusses some of its complexities—where *are* the boundaries around “local,” anyway?—and its importance in strengthening public conversations about rescaling our food systems. Chapter Four offers a basic introduction to U.S. food and farm policy. Two “Work in Progress” interviews in this section—with Brian Donahue of Brandeis University and Anne Effland of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—draw on the deep expertise of historians who bridge the worlds of farming and policy-making, pointing to ways that interpreters can address this gap in their own work. Chapter Five discusses the use of some specialized primary sources relating to food production and consumption. Much of Chapter Five focuses on government data, reflecting the important role that government at all levels has gradually come to play in monitoring and regulating food in the U.S, but it also discusses sources at what seems to be the opposite end of the spectrum—everyday and often intimate materials like cookbooks and restaurant menus—and shows some of the ways that official and “vernacular” sources and projects have been intertwined over time. A “Work in Progress” interview with Native educator and nutritionist Valerie Segrest, coordinator of the Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project, discusses the use of living sources, community knowledge and oral history to trace links among food, place, identity, health, and build food sovereignty.

Section III presents practical methodologies for beginning this work. Chapter Six, “A Fresh Approach to Food and Farm Interpretation,” considers the on-again, off-again

relationship between cultural organizations and civic initiatives. The chapter makes a case that direct engagement in civic life is fully within the ethical parameters of our fields and the implicit and often explicit missions of our institutions. Focusing primarily on museum settings, this discussion explores core structural and strategic methods for refocusing food interpretation around contemporary dialogue and action. Chapter Seven, “Growing Relationships,” sets out questions and ideas about existing and potential partnerships, especially those that cross—or aspire to cross—lines of cultural, economic, and political difference. Returning to the notion of reflexivity, the chapter urges practitioners to build a sense of their own positions and privileges and to challenge the structures that have historically created distances and inequalities among potential collaborators. Chapter Eight examines some of the most common barriers that practitioners undertaking this kind of work may encounter, including negotiating regulatory environments, retraining personnel, and finding new funding sources, offering suggestions for sidestepping, overcoming, or dismantling the obstacles. “Work in Progress” interviews in this section present examples of savvy practitioners dismantling roadblocks and envisioning new ways to integrate knowledge about the past with principled action in the present. Lisa Junkin Lopez discusses her work at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, articulating a vision of museums as dialogic, living entities in service to their communities. Niaz Dorry, coordinating director of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, speaks to the challenges of shifting the terms of the relationship between environmentalists and those who fish for a living so that new solidarities can emerge. Finally, Rolf Diamant, founding superintendent of Marsh-

Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, offers advice for spanning the public-private divide and developing a shared ethos of resource stewardship and management.

A brief epilogue tackles the question of how we know we're succeeding when we undertake this kind of engaged work around food systems. Is it enough just to participate in civic discussions about the past, present, and future of food? Or should we look for more consequential outcomes of our participation? Although the former is a crucial step, we make an argument for the latter, and suggest some ways of developing metrics for evaluating our impact.

Two final notes about terminology and geography. First, we have addressed this book primarily to an audience of professionals working in the areas of museum interpretation and public history, and as with *food* and *farming*, we have used *museum* and *public history* somewhat interchangeably throughout. But just as food and farming clearly overlap without being precisely the same, there are both wide areas of commonality and distinct differences between museum work and public history practice. For those who identify as public historians, it is history that provides the connecting tissue within a highly variegated set of interlocking locations that may include archives, governmental and non-governmental agencies and institutions, historical consulting firms, history museums, and other public-facing and history-oriented projects. For those who think of themselves primarily as museum professionals, museums are the point of connection, with methods and theory that often span the museum field more generally, including art, natural history, and science museums. The distinction makes itself felt in different routes

through training—Museum Studies versus Public History programs, for example—and different professional organizations, conferences, and networks.

At the same time, all of these edges are productively blurry, and we see their borderlands as fruitful sites for working toward more engaged and critical interpretations of food. We have leaned toward the term “public history” in our title and in much of the discussion that follows, in large part because we hope that these ideas will resonate with practitioners across that wider range of locations. At some points in the chapters we do focus more specifically on issues relating to museums—for example, in Chapter Six’s delineation of what a robust interpretive planning process for food history might look like. But in general we have tried not to be bogged down in defining the niceties of the distinctions between museum work and public history work. It has felt more useful to speak to what we see as the broader shared interests of this entire cluster of fields in contributing to civic knowledge and deliberation about food and all that connects to it.

And second, we want to acknowledge the somewhat regional character of many of the examples in the chapters and interviews that follow. Both of us are based in the northeastern U.S., and it shows. We do see the American northeast as a particularly vibrant node within the food movement at present, in part because large-scale food production has never become as entrenched here as elsewhere in the country and so the opportunities for rescaling are perhaps more immediate. But we are not merely being chauvinistic about our own region. Though we’re aware that there is important work being done all around the country and beyond, it was not our aim in this book to survey

or represent all of it. Rather, we hope to reinforce a sense of what an *emplaced* approach to a new food interpretation looks like, because we believe this kind of work must be undertaken in specific places and through active relationship with other people in those places. If we are going to reshape the large systems that put so much distance between ourselves and our food sources, turning food and people alike into commodities and abstractions, we need to locate our efforts firmly within the actual places where we already are.

So we have not tried to counterbalance the northeastern focus of much of our discussion in the book, but have let it stand as a reflection of the questions about scale that we see as inherent in this approach to food interpretation. Even where local food industries arose in connection with the expansion of large-scale food distribution networks, history museums can explore the ramifications of these massive changes on the local and regional realm. And even where the core interpretive stories and audiences may in fact be national ones, our institutions and communities are still “in place,” in ways that can and should shape not just the stories we tell but the relationships we build as we do this work. We look forward to seeing strong regional food interpretation developing alongside strong regional food cultures and systems in the decades to come.

¹ Many observers saw the Middle Eastern uprisings of 2010 and 2011 as directly related to the effects of a globally changing climate and its effects on water and food supply in this arid region. A 2013 report from the Center for American Progress, the Center for Climate and Security and the Stimson Center noted, “The Arab Spring would likely have come one way or another, but the context in which it did is not inconsequential. Global warming may not have caused the Arab Spring, but it may have made it come earlier”

(Ines Perez and ClimateWire, “Climate Change and Rising Food Prices Heightened Arab Spring,” *Scientific American*, March 4, 2013, accessed online).

² Articles in a 2012 food-themed issue of *The Public Historian* journal reflect this approach; Adam Steinberg’s discussion of food interpretation at New York’s Lower East Side Tenement Museum is tellingly titled “What We Talk About When We Talk About Food: Using Food to Teach History at the [Lower East Side] Tenement Museum,” while Andrew Haley’s illuminating exploration of the emergence of “taste” in American culture similarly treats food and history as somehow distinct. “Food is familiar,” Haley notes, “and history often is not.” (Adam Steinberg, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Food: Using Food to Teach History at the Tenement Museum,” *The Public Historian* 34:2 (May 2012): 79-89; Andrew F. Haley, “The Nation Before Taste: The Challenges of American Culinary History,” *The Public Historian* 34:2 (May 2012): 53-78.)

³ The strong orientation of Millennials toward food and their high level of awareness regarding food issues has fascinated pollsters and marketing analysts. As early as 2012, a joint study found that Millennials were much less likely to favor the “one-stop” convenience traditional grocery stores, and more likely to seek out “farm-to-fork,” fresh, local, natural and organic options (Scott Mushkin *et al*, “Trouble in Aisle 5,” Jeffries and Co., Inc., 2012. *AlixPartners.com*, 27 June 2012). Eve Turow tackled the topic in depth in her e-book *A Taste of Generation Yum: How the Millennial Generation’s Love for Organic Fare, Celebrity Chefs, and Microbrews Will Make or Break the Future of Food* (Eve Turow, 2015. *EveTurowPaul.com*).

⁴ These and other trends in museum participation are discussed at length in a report generated by the American Alliance of Museum’s Center for the Future of Museums. See Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva, “Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums,” Washington, D.C., American Alliance of Museums Press, 2010.

⁵ A Reach Advisers survey found that “just over half of regular museumgoers have an explicit interest in food,” and “would love for museums to engage them via food.” Susie Wilkenning, “Do Museums Need to Care About Foodies?,” *Center for the Future of Museums* blog, Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, September 22, 2011.

⁶ The more encompassing term “producers” is favored in the Slow Food movement, while “co-producer” is the equally expansive term for allies, supporters, and others whose role may go well beyond the purely economic relationship suggested by the word “consumers.”

⁷ In many circles, the gender-neutral “fishers” is used in place of “fishermen.” In using the more traditional term here, we are following the practice and preference of most female fishermen of our acquaintance in New England.