SUMMER 2018 TRIP REPORT
FAMILY, WORK, PLAY AND PERSPECTIVE

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We decided to do a road trip in 2018 because we needed to go to Eureka, California to be with family. It was pretty expensive to fly and rent a car and since I can work online, we decided to combine work and fit in some vacation time too! This report covers the work part. The “we” is me, Sue Beckwith, and my life partner and fabulous camp cook Jules Assata. We left on June 18 and I arrived back in Elgin, Texas on August 15. We covered 8,740 miles.
April has helped guide our work to build the Elgin Local Food Center (ELF) for several years. You may know that the ELF will be a shared use kitchen and business development center in downtown Elgin Texas. The Elgin Economic Development Corporation has committed $800,000 toward the $2 million construction cost and we’ll raise the difference in 2018 and 2019. Stay tuned. We may be asking you for funding.

On this visit, we got a tour of April’s new kitchen. This is April’s fourth kitchen so she’s got it down for sure. April is a former farmer and a dynamo when it comes to creating value-added products from Oklahoma grown crops.

April is a key contributor to the 2018 NCAT publication, Beyond Fresh, a Food Processing Guide for Texas Farmers.
April’s new main kitchen is 1,700 square feet and opened just a few weeks prior to our visit. The separate gluten free kitchen is 300 square feet. Most of her clients at her previous location in Oklahoma City are moving into the new space. The building is 6,000 square feet and includes a conference room, office space for rent, and plenty of storage.
See those colored signs on the walls and shelves? April is using colors to help clients use the space and equipment they’ve rented - and not someone else’s. Sounds like a good idea.
On the left is April’s new system for clients to post their licenses and certifications to meet regulatory requirements.
Earth Elements Kitchen is a rental kitchen for food entrepreneurs in the heart of a large urban center. April’s business model relies on client entrepreneurs who understand their business. Her best clients are the ones who run their business well, know their needs, and work with April to ensure they have the equipment and time slots their business requires. What’s different between April’s kitchen and the Elgin Local Food Center (ELF) is that the ELF is rural and will be a business development center and education facility in addition to being a rental kitchen. Funding for the ELF building construction will need to come from philanthropic sources because rental income will fund ELF business development and community education services.
April Harrington has quite a story. Diagnosed with cancer in her 20s, April decided to change the food she eats. She started her organic farm outside Oklahoma City in 1998, one the first certified organic farms in Oklahoma. Soon she had excess crops that were going to waste and she began making value-added products from those crops and selling to the Oklahoma Food Coop with distribution across the state. Before long, other farms asked her to make products for them, so she built her dream kitchen on her farm and embarked on her first value-added processing business. Fate was not in her favor and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, after a lengthy and expensive battle, took her farm to make way for a new highway demolishing her kitchen and home.
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

EARTH ELEMENTS ENTREPRENEURS’ KITCHEN

Undaunted, April opened a new kitchen in the city in partnership with Urban Agrarian, a farm fresh small grocer and budding food hub. In 2018, she moved that kitchen into a building she owns and once again reopened the Earth Elements Entrepreneurs’ Kitchen serving farmers and local food entrepreneurs in Oklahoma City.

Lessons I learned: Leadership and strong management skills are essential. Perseverance and hard work pay off. Buy used equipment. Use color coding. Have more storage than you think you need.
At the Texas Center for Local Food, we’ll continue to rely on April’s experience and kindness to design and build the Elgin Local Food Center and to understand best practices for the rental aspects of our business model. April has already reviewed our building layout, equipment list and our current ELF design is better for her contribution.

Beyond Fresh: A Food Processing Guide for Texas Farmers is available from NCAT here.
After leaving Oklahoma City, we stopped for a visit to Palo Duro Canyon. Yes that’s a wild turkey - a small flock was right on the hiking path. Local food! Oh right, no hunting in the park. Back into the air conditioned car and onto food coops and cliff dwellings in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.
Near the headwaters of the Rio Grande River is the Santa Clara Pueblo, home of the Santa Clara people. The pueblo used to be here on the mesa in summer and in the cliffs in winter where people farmed and hunted in the valleys below. In the mid-1500s, the water ran out and the people moved closer to the river where they live today. The green strip in the center photo is the Rio Grande Valley here in New Mexico. The Puye site was first excavated in 1907. The walls in the left photo are what’s left of 3-story buildings. The archaeologist who did the original excavating became disrespectful of the pueblo people and removed significant artifacts. The people kicked him out and now only indigenous archaeologists are permitted here. We highly recommend a visit with the guided tour offered by Santa Clara guides. Jules and our wonderful guide are in the pic on the right. Can you find them?
At last the dry windy desert gave way to mountains and the irrigated fields of the southern part of California’s Central Valley, the San Joaquin Valley. Most of the vegetables, fruits and nuts in the U.S. are grown in the Central Valley. Dolores Huerta grew up here. The thing is - the rivers are so low that none of them flow to the Pacific Ocean anymore. Most rivers flowed into Tulare Lake which then overflowed seasonally into the San Joaquin which flowed into the Pacific Ocean. Tulare was the largest freshwater lake in the U.S. west of the Mississippi. It’s dry now and and according to Wikipedia has been since 1899. All water continues to be diverted for agriculture and cities.

The temp was 100 degrees outside of our air conditioned car where farmworkers worked in the fields. The air smelled of brassica which I don’t understand in late June, but there it was in the fields with a bluish hue. As we drove northeast, we saw fewer vegetables and many orchards. We think they were almonds and pistachios but whatever they were, farmers were planting lots of them. We saw all ages of trees from newly planted to mature. Almonds need bees and bees don’t tolerate pesticides. Maybe that's a good thing. Recommended reading: The Beekeeper's Lament...
I was so happy to stumble upon Pie Ranch on the Pacific Coast highway near San Jose. I had met one of the owners at a conference a few years back and he had told me they were putting together a deal to sell to Google for their employee cafeteria. He had shared his ambitious expansion plans for his new plantings so I was eager to hear how it was going. The person working the (lovely and welcoming) farm store indicated that the deal isn’t in place anymore. I’ll be getting in touch to see what happened and what we can learn about sales to corporate cafeterias for our food hub feasibility project in central Texas.
Values matter and Pie Ranch makes theirs very clear. The lists on the chalk board are: What it means to be food justice certified, definition of food justice, why we need food justice, how you can help.
WESTWARD BOUND
PIE RANCH

What it Means to be Food Justice Certified:

- Fair pricing for farmers
- Workers and farmers rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining
- Fair wages and benefits for workers
- Fair and equitable contracts for farmers and buyers
- Clear conflict resolution policies for farmers, food business owners/managers and workers
- Workplace health and safety
- Clean and safe farmworker housing
- Learning contracts for interns and apprentices
- No full time child labor, carefully supervised participation of children on farms

Definition of Food Justice:

Food Justice seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, processed, and eaten are shared fairly and equitably - Pie Ranch 💜
WESTWARD BOUND

PIE RANCH AND THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Why We Need Food Justice:
Agricultural based labor that made the expansion of the United States possible was provided by enslaved Africans. Yet today cultivation, harvest, processing, and delivery is labor done by people of color who are exploited. This helps sustain the low cost of food. Laborers are mostly migrant farmers who do not have citizen status and are underpaid for seasonal work and live with threat of deportation.

How You Can Help:
- Support food justice
- Certified organizations like Pie Ranch!
- Speak for others affected by food injustices.
Happy are we. We bought goodies at the Pie Ranch store. Delicious strawberries soothe a parched body - so juicy and sweet. Jules is very happy to be at the Pacific. This is her home water and we are just a few miles from where she grew up.
La Cocina food business incubator in San Francisco serves immigrant business people with a full program of training, business development and commercial kitchen facilities. La Cocina is a pure incubator providing clients detailed one-on-one coaching with a support staff of 3. They require full transparency from their clients including regular financial reports and open exploration of any issues as they arise. Their totally hands on approach combined with deep staff involvement for every client surely requires a lot of trust.
A business has to work hard to be accepted as a La Cocina client. The typical company accepted into the program is post-revenue (they have sold something) and demonstrates an absolute commitment to growing their business. About 75% want to open restaurants and the rest want to create packaged products. Most do not use locally grown ingredients - La Cocina’s focus is more on catalyzing business success than on cultivating local agriculture - as we all know, it’s tough to have both. San Francisco is a city full of commercial kitchen and business development services for companies that aren’t yet ready for the La Cocina program. That’s a lot more regional capacity than we have in central Texas.
Almost every kitchen I’ve spoken with over the past 3 years has told me storage capacity is their biggest shortfall. La Cocina has storage including cold spaces for incoming and outgoing products. The rent on their building is in exchange for managing the apartments upstairs for the building’s owner. They run their very effective programs mostly on philanthropic contributions. I want to thank Leticia Landa for taking the time to show me around. I gave her very short notice and she was gracious and kind to allow me to interrupt her day.

Lessons I learned: Be deliberate in your mission, know your customers, and have ample funding for a strong staff to support your mission.
This beautiful display at the downtown ferry building marketplace educates the public about the benefits of sustainable agriculture. Large posters line the walls of the entrance and form the back drop of the thrice weekly farmers market. Visitors will get a good education on everything from soil health to pollination, food equity, and healthy local economies. With all the workers in downtown San Francisco, I imagine the farmers at the market do pretty well.
I’ve been told that employee cafeterias so common in large tech companies serve pretty healthy food and that several, like Google and Apple, purchase a fair amount from local farms. Research into the employee cafeteria market would be useful in central Texas. Meanwhile, the City of San Francisco is considering a proposed ban on employee cafeterias. Local restaurants that planted themselves near these companies aren’t doing so well because, of course, there’s a good free lunch in the employee cafeteria. It will be interesting to see how this plays out and what the impact will be, if any, on local farm sales. With average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment at $3,250, many tech workers appreciate the free food. Given San Francisco’s famed affordable housing crisis, I wonder where the restaurant workers are supposed to live and what working in the city means for their access to healthy food.
We headed north out of the city on a Friday en route to our family in Eureka, CA. We had scheduled a meet up in Sebastopol with farmer Katie, our Texas Center for Local Food development advisor and grant writer extraordinaire. But Katie had to work weekend markets so we spent two glorious days at the Russian River amidst the redwoods in a sweet campground called Schoolhouse Canyon. After kayaking the mouth of the Russian River with harbor seal families, we met up with Katie in Sebastopol. Katie and I discussed ideas and sources for raising money so the Texas Center for Local Food can continue our Value Chain Coordination work. I look forward to seeing Katie back in Texas this fall and we can get to work making our ideas reality.
What is Value Chain Coordination? The food value chain looks a lot like the regular supply chain EXCEPT the companies involved deliberately structure their core operations to focus on both financial success and social benefit. Together, their shared operational values support their decisions and processes. Value Chain Coordination is a big part of what we do at the Texas Center for Local Food. It’s challenging to fund this work, perhaps because it’s tough to measure outcomes for system change work that involves lots of networking and meetings. We’re seeing success though and we’re not giving up and we know you’re not either.
When is locally sourced food appealing and when is it not? I think most consumers think “local” is from a small farm where the animals are treated humanely and the vegetables grown without dangerous chemicals. The pic on the right was in a large scale chain grocery store - the one on the left in a coffee shop in Ukiah, CA. I looked up Rosie’s chicken and their website says the birds are free range and fed vegetarian diets. The latter is the first clue that the birds were likely never outside … because they would eat bugs if they were outside - not in the vegetarian diet. Factories for raising animals for food do create local jobs. You choose.
After some serious family time and high speed internet in Eureka, CA, we headed east toward Montana for a planned meeting with the good folks at the Mission Mountain Enterprise Center (MMEC) in Ronan (pop. 1,870). Our route took us through Oregon and into Washington along the Columbia River and its spellbinding scenery.
The massive power of the Columbia is awe inspiring. It fairly rages in the high winds and as we traveled east the tree filled mountains became beige desert-like hills. With the Columbia for irrigation, lots of wheat is farmed out here - amber waves of grain really. We passed through The Dalles the day the big fire started; five days later it had become the number one fire priority in the nation, burning over 75,000 acres of mostly wheat fields. Sadly, the crop was 10 days from harvest. In addition to crop loss, farmers also lost fences, outbuildings, equipment and homes.
We were taken in by the name and I didn’t expect what we found at the SAGE Sustainable Agriculture and Energy Center in Boardman, Oregon. I thought we’d see exhibits extolling the virtues of organic and sustainable agriculture along with demonstrations of how regenerative ag can in fact feed the world and help us all be healthier. Not exactly. The exhibits did include sustainable and organic ag and renewable energy but the main thrust was really on large scale conventional ag. It was as if they used sustainable agriculture to get people in so they could sell them on so called clean coal and pesticide-laden ag that will “feed the world”.

It wasn’t all bad. The interactive exhibits were engaging and fun for all ages, like the machine above that shows the creation of curly potatoes from potato to bag. I totally geek out on fine machinery. The SAGE Center definitely helps people get closer to their food. The messaging though felt a bit like bait and switch. The word “sustainable” is being increasingly used to refer to an ability to continue feeding people via the conventional “feed the world” narrative. I’m now in favor of using the term “regenerative” to describe the work we do at the Texas Center for Local Food. Regenerative agriculture and economies leading to healthy people and communities.
We arrived in western Montana a few days early for our meeting with Jan Tusick of the Mission Mountain Enterprise Center (MMEC) in Ronan, MT. I first met Jan at the Farm-to-School conference in Austin in 2014. Meeting Jan really helped us gel our ideas for Elgin as a center for local food enterprise, and processing in particular. Food processing is a local job creating machine and, if done well, can provide quality jobs and healthier people. Sounds like a win-win.

Since we had a few days before my meeting with Jan, we spent time working and playing at the national forest campground at Georgetown Lake. Nice place for a remote office - and with 4 bars to boot!
EASTBOUND

MISSION MOUNTAIN FOOD ENTERPRISE CENTER

The Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) is a project of the Lake County Economic Development Corporation in the small town of Ronan, Montana. We are grateful for the guidance and advice that Director Jan Tusick has provided for our project, the Elgin Local Food Center. Jan kindly took time to give me a tour of their facility. I was so happy to finally see it in person!
The true grit of the people of Montana is evident throughout the MMFE Center. They’ve added on and created spaces for new functions including customized space for long term clients; they work hard to meet demand for processing of locally grown crops. Much of their equipment is used seasonally like this cherry pitting machine. When not in use, they have plenty of storage for equipment to be moved in and out when it’s needed. I didn’t get to see the super cool butternut squash peeler seen in this video. For our Elgin Local Food Center, we’ll need to include space for seasonal equipment storage so that when farmers need it, we’ll have it.
The MMFE Center is a certified inspected facility by both FDA and USDA. These certifications are neither easy nor inexpensive to get and maintain. MMFEC has a full time food safety expert on staff and this enables them to support processing for sale to schools, grocers and other wholesale buyers. That’s a big deal in Montana because there aren’t that many sales outlets - the population of the whole state is only 1 million people - that’s half the size of the Austin metro area.

Fresh vegetables are washed and dipped in a bleach solution, processed, vacuum sealed and then quick frozen for later sale. Quick freezing is done in a dedicated freezer that was custom made using a specially designed quick cooling device, like a coolbot on steroids. This method costs a lot less than a commercial flash freezer.
The industrial food processor on the left is must have for chopping and cutting all kinds of vegetables. The two 40-gallon jacketed kettles in the right pic are run by a boiler system. Would Jan install this same system again? Nope, she would use electric kettles because the boiler system is expensive to maintain and less reliable than electric.

Jan does like that floor drain though. It runs the length of the processing area and although it needs regular cleaning, it keeps the muck and hot water spills confined. The concrete floor gets painted at least every 2 years - that's what keeps it food safe. Concrete is more affordable and easier to maintain than epoxy floors.
The gunk in the floor drain is ground up by a machine under the floor below that white pole so it’s in small pieces to be sent to the trap that catches it before it heads to the municipal wastewater system.

Everything that can be on wheels is on wheels. We hear this time and time again - create flexible spaces.
Smokers (left) are used by several clients. This is one of three - they are well vented and in their own room, so the whole place doesn’t smell like smoked food. This may seem unimportant, but if you’re a maker of cookies in the next kitchen, you probably don’t want your cookies to smell like beef jerky.

The machine on the right is a semi automated filler for flowable materials. You fill the cones with your product and the machine fills your containers with the exact amount you’ve preset. Semi-automated means that you place the container underneath the spout by hand, not on a moving belt, and you pull the lever to fill. Easy peasy especially for small batches.
Plenty of storage by design. Incoming ingredients and finished products are stored separately, with finished products near the exit for easy load out. There are also coolers and freezers near the loading dock.

As always I learned many lessons from Jan’s experience that we will apply as we develop the ELF. I have extensive detailed notes that are not included in this report.
Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center has been operating for over 10 years and is funded by the Lake County Economic Development Corporation, grants and philanthropic sources. They have staff who process local crops for sale to Montana schools and they partner with the Montana Growers Cooperative for all distribution and logistics.

They copack products for local food entrepreneurs and work with schools to develop new products using Montana crops that students love to eat. Their most recent success is the lentil burger. The burger uses Montana grown lentils and provides a protein source that’s affordable for schools. As they were developing the recipe, the team sought student input; they revised the recipe so the burger didn’t “look like buffalo turds” as the students put it. Yes, get customer input on your products before you go to market!
Just east of Glacier National Park is the town of Conrad where the radical notion of commercial regenerative agriculture began to take hold in Montana. Back in the 1980s, a handful of organic farmers got together to grow organic pulse crops. They chose lentils as their crop just as the natural food boom was taking off. Perfect timing, right? To scale up, they needed bigger processing equipment so they went to the local banks who said “What’s a lentil?” Then the banks said no. Turning to family and friends the small company, Timeless Seeds, bought the equipment they needed. “That’s how it is with the Timeless family, so our commitment to farming and our communities runs true and deep.” Today, 30 years from their founding Timeless Seeds continues to honor their deep commitment, providing healthy food and jobs in Montana’s rural communities. Recommended Reading: Lentil Underground by Liz Carlisle
We stayed in Great Falls so I could have good internet for a webinar panel on Value Chain Coordination. As we headed east, we could see fields of hay all the way to the horizon and plenty of what appeared to be food crops, flax and mustard. I wondered about Timeless Seeds and whether system change is most effective from within the system. Timelssss grew as market demand increased fueled by consumer education, yet Timeless was perceived as outside the systems of the day. System change requires both external and internal levers; most innovation is perceived as external at the onset of a change. How many more acres are in food crops for people in Montana compared to 30 years ago? How many are organic?

We camped at the edge of the Badlands in eastern Montana. Fun fact: The first Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton was found near here. About half of the thirty T. Rex discovered in the world were found in this area.
EASTBOUND

UPPER MIDWEST

We were due to be in Michigan so we hustled on across North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin with quick stops to visit friends along the way. These pics are from the bulletin board at the Eastside Food Coop in Minneapolis. I sure like seeing farm posters with all the contact tabs gone. One of our big lessons on this trip is that we don’t need to carry 2 weeks of food; there’s plenty of good local food available, mostly at coops across the west.

I wasn’t familiar with the P6 standards before I saw them publicized at the Eastside Coop. P6 is a standard employed by grocery coops to support a fair food economy by promoting small, local, and cooperative producers. P6 labels help customers understand more about the values behind the food they are choosing and to know more about where their money is going. Here’s an explanatory video.
After a few vacation days in Michigan, the time had come for Jules to fly back home to start school. We celebrated the great time we’d had together full of beauty and learning and of course loads of laughter.

I took the ferry across Lake Michigan to rendezvous in Milwaukee with our Texas Center for Local Advisor, friend and geographer, Dr Naya Jones. Naya and her partner Kevin founded Food for Black Thought in Austin; they came to Elgin in 2016 to collect food stories from Elgin residents who are from historically marginalized communities.

We spent many delightful hours talking about food systems and the various ways that organizations link health to food. We talked about how to move forward with the Texas statewide collaborative of organizations working to make our Texas food system more equitable and regenerative. Naya and I share the perspective that engaging communities directly is the best approach. Naya agreed to be on our team to develop an Equity in Food Systems training for Texas that will be required for all leadership of the statewide Texas local food collaborative. Our plan is to scope the project, get costs, find funding, survey the existing landscape of equity training and get to work on a Texas-specific training. Those of you on the team will love working with Naya - she is brilliant, thoughtful and a delight to work with!
I stopped in to Ames, Iowa for an in person update on our Local Food Leader (LFL) and Community Food Systems (CFS) training with Courtney Long and Kaley Hohenshell of Iowa State University Extension. Courtney and Kaley had come to Elgin in the spring of 2018 to pilot these trainings for our Texas group that included folks from Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Houston and Austin. Iowa State is refining the LFL and CFS training based on feedback from our Texas group and others.

One change is that they will cover material more deeply in the one day Local Food Leader. They’ll reduce the time spent on the equity portion and they were glad to hear that we’ll be developing a training for Equity in Food Systems in Texas. The revised Iowa State training will also include a module on local resources for food system development. Good progress! Our Texas group is completing the online modules for LFL and CFS this fall and we’re looking forward to more feedback. This training has strong potential to leverage our resources in Texas for more impact toward a more just food system.
I was intrigued at last year’s annual meeting of the Organization for Competitive Markets and decided to participate again this year. It’s a small group of maybe 100 people, mostly farmers; mid-size and large family farms. Nearly all appear to be white. A bunch are contract poultry growers and there’s a significant number of dairies represented. Many of these folks farm in a way that is unfamiliar to me: conventional, monoculture and animal factories - that’s part of what I find intriguing. The 2018 agenda is here.

Their concerns are not that different from small diversified farms when it comes to large food monopolies and monopsonies. What’s different is that these folks are on the front lines of the worst aspects of food system consolidation. They are at risk of losing their farms due to bad contracts, markets out of their control, and prices set by vertically integrated buyers. Farms that, in many cases, have been in their families for years.

You know, the farms we work with in central Texas are not, in general, at risk of loss - not like this. Our markets, mostly direct, are not terrible although they may need rethinking. But as we work to grow our wholesale markets, we’re hitting right up against consolidation. I went to Kansas City to see what I could learn by listening to these folks who’ve been fighting consolidation for decades.
To be clear, I haven’t been part of this group and I don’t know the history. I am certain though that these farmers are committed to finding ways to keep farming viable for themselves and future generations.

A big issue I think we can agree on is **Country of Origin labelling**, especially for beef. Currently an animal can be born, raised and slaughtered outside the U.S. and labeled “Product of U.S.A.” provided it passes through a USDA-inspected plant. Support for changing this rule to require that beef labelled “Product of U.S.A.” be born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the U.S.A. has come from all national groups supporting U.S. family farms and ranches but **not from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Assn. (NCBA)**. Again, I don’t know much about the politics here, but it sure seems that someone could follow the money and explore why the NCBA does not support this change.

Check out this **video** aimed at consumers to encourage action on the Country of Origin issue. **DEADLINE** for public comment is September 17, 2018. Submit your **comments to the United States government here**.

For a quick education on food labels in general, please visit the **Food and Water Watch label page**. The pic of the cattle is from our Texas farm back in 2009.
I found the panel on community the most engaging and I was happy to see a broader community perspective brought to this conference. Tamara Jones of the Southeastern African American Farmers’ Organic Network (SAAFON) reminded us that the problems of farmers, hunger, poor health and other ills are endemic to our current food system. Even as we’re trying to build alternative spaces, institutions and markets that support profit, yes, and also provide community value with equity and justice at their core, Tamara emphasized that these efforts require investment. She asked how are we investing in communities and groups that are building alternative structures and processes that support new, more just systems. Call it “investing in a just economy”.

She called out to funders that if you are not funding this kind of systemic change, then you are not going to have the impact you desire over the long term, and you may be undermining system change. We must go beyond reform. SAAFON’s membership of small- and mid-scale farms care a great deal about their communities in addition, of course, to caring about profitability. Tamara shared an example of a female farmer who is setting up a program to welcome young women aging out of foster care to her farm to learn farming, develop a profession and get support services to flourish in their lives.
There was certainly more emphasis this year on regenerative agriculture with the dynamic and often hilarious presentation by Kevin Fulton of Fulton Farm. Kevin and his family operate a 2,800 acre regenerative livestock farm in Nebraska. Yes, 2,800 acres - farms are big out here. A few years after he took over his family’s farm, he converted to pasture-raised livestock and organic production. Here’s a video of Kevin from 2017 and I hope you’ll watch the video of Kevin’s lunch keynote when it’s posted on the OCM site.
Interesting factoids from my notes (unverified):

- 92% of seafood purchased in America is imported. 60% of U.S. caught seafood is exported. Speaker Brett Tolley of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance recommended the film Cod is Dead, from the Netflix series Rotten.

- Americans consume 92 pounds of chicken per year per person. Pilgrim’s Pride in Texas in mid-2018 is shifting to organic and told their producers to get certified organic by October or they won’t buy their birds.

- America is losing about 3 dairies each day. Even the coops are pushing the small dairies out. Walmart is moving to control the milk supply. In 1980 there were 335,000 dairies in the U.S. In 2017 there were 40,000.

- Let’s stop calling CAFO’s farms. Call them what they are: animal factories.

- Lots of good food movement building and momentum at the HEAL Food Alliance.

- Food system workers earn a median wage of $10/hr. There are 21 million food system workers in the U.S., making the food sector the largest employer. 13% of U.S. households are food insecure; 20% of food workers' households are food insecure. 2016 Report: No Piece of the Pie.

- Wages in rural America are decreasing twice as fast as wages in urban areas.

- Federal trade policies that are enforceable by the market are best because they require less government enforcement and therefore cost less. Ex: Rule to require mobile number transfer between service providers.

- Suppliers (farms, ranches) are being increasingly squeezed by slower payments by buyers. This will put a small business out of business almost immediately because it creates negative cash flow.
There were other inspiring and informative presentations including the keynote by Ricardo Salvador of the Union of Concerned Scientists. I encourage you to visit the OCM site once the slides and videos are posted.

Two solutions to consolidation that were repeated over and over:

(i) educate consumers about where their food comes from - shine a light and let consumers choose, and

(ii) support local food by developing regional value chains. Sounds like a job for value chain coordination.
While at the OCM conference, I met up with Sarah Lloyd of the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative to talk about our central Texas food hub feasibility study. Sarah has been involved with the food hub for many years and provided lots of great information about their start up.

They started with 11 farmers and sold to 6 grocers. Farmers were motivated to get involved because they didn’t want to do the invoicing, selling or delivery. Initial food hub sales were mostly to one regional scale grocer. The hub provides food safety training and certification support that is critical for grocery sales. Initially, farmer coop members didn’t want to take on any debt, but that changed as it was found to be unrealistic if the food hub was to grow.

I’ll be sharing more detailed notes with the Central Texas Food Hub Feasibility team. It was an absolute delight to finally meet Sarah! Please note the picture above was taken at midnight after an evening of chatting over wine.
Here are highlights from what I learned on this trip:

- I’ve improved our list of equipment to buy for the Elgin Local Food Center.
- Size matters and it’s better to have multiple kitchen spaces, some that can flex size and others that are separated by walls. Ex: gluten free, dry prep for herbs and spice mixes
- We already knew we needed lots of storage for ingredients and finished products. Now we know we need storage for equipment whose use fluctuates seasonally.
- I need to share the fact that it’s okay that regenerative agriculture is more labor intensive than conventional mono-culture. We invest a lot of money in job creation - why not in agriculture?
- Reinforced the knowledge that business development services are essential for the Elgin Local Food Center (ELF). To create jobs, the ELF needs program staff to help businesses develop and grow.
- Reinforced the knowledge that cooking classes at the ELF will improve the health of people in Elgin and central Texas.
- Plenty of folks are willing to help us develop the ELF.
- I love western Montana.
HOME! HOME! HOME!

PERSPECTIVES

- I am privileged to live in such a beautiful country and to be able to do the work I do.
- I am fortunate beyond measure to love and be loved.
- I missed being around African-American people out in the west and was grateful when we arrived in the midwest.
- Farmers’ commitment to their communities is undervalued.
- Create new systems. Go beyond reform. Work at the center, not the edges.
- Deep change is slow and yet the requisite inflection points are abundant if we just recognize them. Often a person or a book or a report changes the course of action and sets the future path. How can our Texas local food collaborative be an inflection point? What action can I take to help make that so?
- Look first at ourselves, our own choices. What food do we eat? What do we do to support a just food system? How do we work against it? How much of our money do we spend on locally grown foods and locally made products? What do we buy with our organizations’ money?
- I don’t do this work to create a new food system because I feel pity or because I want us to cling to occupations that no longer have value. I do this work because I am devoted to the ideal that all people deserve to have the choice to live healthy, fulfilling lives and our current food system does not support that choice.
- Is it so idealistic and unreasonable to think we can change the world? If not us, dear reader, then who?
Thank you to everyone I met with this summer for taking the time to help us in Texas learn from what you do. Thank you to our friends for being there - what a treasure you are.

Our 2011 Toyota van ran great! Thank you to our mechanic Brian at The Auto Shop in Bastrop and our oil change guys at Oil Works in Austin for our pre-trip check (yes we changed the oil on the trip). Thank you to dear friends Louise and Anya for building the bed that made the van a camper and for gifting us with a fabulous and hilarious San Francisco mini-vacation.

This report was made on a Mac using Keynote and formatted based on Slidedoc idea from Nancy Duarte. Best gear for working on the road: Goal Zero 150w solar rechargeable battery pack, Goal Zero Nomad 28 Plus solar panel, MacBook Pro 13”, iPhone 7Plus

Trip costs were at personal expense, except for days of site visits, meetings, and conferences.

Dear reader, I hope you’ve found this report useful and that in some small way, it furthers our work together to create a healthier and resilient food system for all Texans.