A symbol of status and order, the manicured lawn is a defining feature of American suburban neighborhoods, and has been acknowledged, historically, as an aesthetic ideal for homeowners. A lesser known fact, however, is that long term lawn maintenance necessitates the excessive use of fossil fuels and water, as well as the creation and exploitation of ecological dead zones. Minimalistic lawns negate the possibility of growing food in the spaces wherein they exist, despite having great agricultural potential to nourish those who live in relation to them – the central aim of this project is to actualize that potential. Through socially and economically encouraging the Woodstock community to revert their lawns to gardens, we can begin developing a larger, ecologically sustainable system that facilitates the localized management of an underappreciated land resource, bringing us closer to our end goal of helping our Southeast Portland neighborhood in attaining food sovereignty.

In the state of Oregon, food insecurity is a pervasive issue that disproportionality affects marginalized identities. Food swamps, urban areas in which nutritious food is considered a privilege instead of a necessity, pervade the United States, conglomerating in major cities and industrial townships. In addition to greater systemic issues, which contribute to the intersectional oppression that characterizes the Western hemisphere – the despondent belief that fresh produce will remain reserved for those who occupy the upper-echelons of society dramatically affects underrepresented communities, leaving vulnerable groups disconnected from resources vital to their well-being. In order to argue that inadequate food distribution must be counterbalanced by economic incentives, one must first acknowledge that global change stems from localities driven by optimism and proactivity.

Economic insecurity is not an individual experience – it emerges from broader systemic issues that affect everyone – marginalized communities in particular. Change begins when we start restructuring the networks that oppress the underrepresented and paying attention to the well being of our neighbors. Addressing the root of those flaws, that deprive vulnerable groups of much needed resources, requires us to look at how the past informs the present. For instance, the COVID-19 Pandemic dramatically increased the number of food insecure Oregonians by nearly 40%. Indeed, according to the Oregon Food Bank, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure before the virus began to spread. Currently, 1 in 4 Oregonians are struggling to sustain themselves. It is certainly worth noting that there has been a spike in environmental catastrophes – each one leading to food shortages in an extraordinarily small amount of time. The first year of the Pandemic was the most devastating. Between 2019 and 2020, Oregon’s food insecurity rate rose 21%, with the height of the pandemic resulting in nearly 1.7 million neighbors seeking food assistance through the Oregon Food Bank Network — double what we saw in the prior year.¹

Based in Portland, Oregon, our Project centers around Woodstock’s food insecure population – who exist within numerous interrelated communities and systems, many of which we are already invested in improving. Reimagining our methods of food distribution means recognizing that healthy eating is a human right, protected only through our natural desire to care for and share with one another. One example of an alternative system that promotes even food distribution is a gift economy, where status is determined not by how much one accumulates, but by how much one gives away. In addition to the matter of distribution, is the issue of food quality which is not simply determined by calorie count. Our goal is to incentivize people who have limited food accessibility and information to move away from industrialized meals curated by large businesses and to instead gravitate toward fresh produce and organic ingredients. The production and preparation of what we eat is in the hands of profit-driven food businesses – whose interests have been slowly but surely falling out of alignment with the needs of their consumers, as evidenced by the emergence of food swamps in urban areas across the United States. The harsh reality for Americans living within larger cities today is that the most accessible food is often the least healthy. Where farmers markets and independent grocers are sporadically located throughout cities, fast food restaurants sit at nearly every major intersection. Within grocery stores and supermarkets, nutritionally dense food is priced irregularly high, leaving underpaid consumers with options that are neither healthy nor satisfying to eat.

¹ Oregon Food Bank Network
The industrialized food economy rewards businesses that take shortcuts and effectively siphon money from their customers. Techniques such as aggressive marketing and adding addictive ingredients hinder our ability to develop good eating habits, perpetuating endless rounds of production and, ultimately, destroying both our bodies and the planet. Through its Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and over tillage of crop fields, Big Agriculture is virtually the leading contributor to global warming via greenhouse gas release into the atmosphere, rivaled only by the Transportation Industry. Dealing with a climate crisis means making food production and preparation the responsibility of everyday people, not profit-wired industries.

The objective of our project is to implement a new, local food system that will provide the food-insecure people of Woodstock with fresh produce—grown in the front yards of nearby homeowners. There will be about 500 square feet of plantable soil spread amongst 15 garden beds and 10 landowners. The farm team will consist of us two, and also a professional farm consultant. Our farm consultant completed the Zenger Farm apprenticeship program and has committed 2-3 hours a week to helping us fill gaps in our expertise and to help us with planning. The consultant will check in with us weekly and they will be on call to answer any questions when they aren't on-site. Our goal will be to produce 500 pounds of vegetables to be distributed by the church over the course of the summer, which is approximately 500 servings of vegetables. Our partner, the Woodstock Food Pantry, an extension of the All Saints Church, has agreed to take responsibility for distributing the produce directly to those in need during their food drives on Fridays and Saturdays. Since the Pantry is only 4 blocks away, We'll easily be able to use our bike trailer to haul over our produce when we start to harvest. We will execute this process of growing and distributing in accordance with the following plan:

Provisional Timeline

**Weeks 1-2 – Preparation (Mid May, 2023):**
- Consult with land lenders about raised bed placement (Many folks in the neighborhood have already expressed interest in lending their land and a commitment to continued gardening in the raised bed in following seasons).
- Work with a professional consultant on a crop plan.
- Assemble a germination chamber and start growing seedlings.
- Have all raised beds built and trellised depending on the crop by the end of week 2.

**Weeks 2-12 – Implementation and maintenance (Late May - Mid August):**
- Buy a portion of plants as seedlings for the first round of the crop rotation.
- We will work full time implementing and maintaining the crop plan, with the help of a part time professional consultant.

**Weeks 8-12 – Harvesting (Late July - Mid August):**
- Harvest and deliver produce to the Woodstock Community Pantry at All Saints church for them to distribute to local food insecure people.

**Week 12 – Wrapping up and looking forward (Mid August):**
- Compare our outcomes to our goals and expectations.
- Have conversations with and survey all community members involved.
- Continue to harvest and deliver through October.

Working as a pair, we are proposing a plan to create a system that can exist independently in the future, without our involvement. We have already started working with land lenders who understand the importance of food rights and are interested in having a better relationship with the land they occupy through transforming their lawns into sources of nourishment and vitality. Marketing a gift economy only requires the giving or receiving of gifts. Throughout the season land lenders will hopefully develop a sense of the joy that accompanies giving. As people of color, whose ancestors have been violently stripped of their food sovereignty, reconnecting with the land by growing food is a means of spiritual healing. In a world where land is power, and 98 percent of agricultural land is owned by white people, decentralized, small-scale borrowed land for food growing is a way forward for BIPOC to have more agency in what we eat.²

² usda