Dinner 2040 Joan McGregor (JM) interviewed by Jon England (JE) on July 12, 2016, Flagstaff AZ

JE: This is Jon England, I'm here interviewing—could you please say your name.
JM: Joan McGregor.
JE: And today is July 12, 2016, and we're here in Flagstaff. And Joan if you could please tell me when and where you were born?
JM: I was born in Seattle, WA. You want to know when?
JE: You don't have to, if you don't want to. [Laughs]
JM: [Laughs] Okay, I'm not going to disclose my age for—
JE: That's fine.
JM: Okay
JE: Yeah, and could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and sort of the community?
JM: Okay I was actually, though, I was born in Seattle, but I grew up in the San Francisco bay area. So my parents moved there when I was six months old, so I pretty much grew up in that, in the bay area, which is known to be, I mean, next to, you know, very good agricultural lands and farms and so on, so we used to go out on the weekend to Half Moon Bay, and buy farm food.
JE: Great, and how long did you live there?
JM: So I guess I lived there, you know, pretty much through secondary school and then went to a number of places and eventually ended up in U.C. Davis to do my undergraduate degree in philosophy.
JE: Perfect. That's the next question. Maybe you could tell me a little bit more about your schooling and education. Both your pre-college years and then, into secondary education.
JM: Well, lets see—[Laughs]. So my primary years were—moved down the peninsula we lived in Belmont, and then San Mateo, went to school there. I guess in terms of, I mean, one of the things I remember most often about going to school, for some reason, for a variety of reasons, my dad in particular was very militant about food, and didn't believe in buying any kind of processed food, including, and I grew up, of course, in the sixties and seventies when it was sort of a heyday of white bread, Wonder Bread, TV dinners. The sort of whole processed food was just emerging and it was really thought at that time, or now I think back on it, it was sort of the middle class way to eat. So, when I was a kid we were never allowed to have white bread, or any sugar. So we, my Dad at that time, when I was a kid, said sugar was worse than heroin [Laughs] and I always remember thinking, I don't know what heroin is, it must be pretty bad.
JE: Wow. If I could ask real quick, where do you think that militancy came from?
JM: He had been a gymnast and a body builder back in the 30s and 40s. And he grew up during the Depression when there wasn't a lot of food around, and his family always had a little garden in the back yard where they grew food. And I think he just got on to seeing food as central to health and the sort of mind, body, spirit idea of the role of food in your life. So it wasn't—this was in the bay area way before all the—this is not the foodie revolution now. This was more, early 60s, where it was just really unheard of that

people wouldn't eat white bread, or wouldn't eat various kinds of processed foods. Because that was really what was—that was the heyday of that food. Right? It was really the development, was in the 60s and 70s. So yeah, I think my Dad, probably because of being a weight lifter, being a gymnast, and he always talked about during the Depression how many people didn't have enough or access to good food. I remember him talking about one of his good friends whose family didn't have enough food, I mean a lot of people didn't at that time, and the kids all got rickets, and really became very sick. And those kinds of health conditions lasted well into their later lives. Right? So, I think seeing that experience of people not having access to any food or having access to just very poor quality food made him very aware of eating good food. Even my mother talks about that, even though, my parents [Laughs] didn't necessarily have a happy marriage they got divorced, but she always said the one good thing about my father was he really was insistent that we didn't eat canned or frozen vegetables. We would always get fresh vegetables and fresh food, so that kind of formed my thinking about food. And then, I come from a family though—there's no reason other than eating real food and eating good food that everybody's pretty much lived very long lives without health problems, without significant health problems. So I always like to tell the story of my grandfather, my dad's father, he was from the north of England, and his family was so poor—the father died and he ended up when he was eight working in the mines, the coal mines, before they came to Canada, all these guys, and there was no opportunity so they came in like 18—what was it? 190—1911 or something like that, they came over, but even though he had kind of that really, pretty deficient upbringing and having to work in the mines as a little kid, he lived to 101. [Laughs] But you know, they always ate good food. And again, not sort of fancy food, just they had a garden in the backyard where they grew food. And they always had fresh bread, that was whole wheat bread, those kinds of things, so, again, not a fancy, diet, but just real fresh whole food.

JE: I know this was kind of a young age, but did you get a sense that your father's idea of food was a common idea?

JM: No. [Laughs] No, not at all. In fact, we went to school, all the other kids had white bread sandwiches with American cheese, Ding Dongs, that was the beginning of all those packaged pastries from Hostess and potato chips. I guess kids at that point didn't have soda at school, but people were able to drink soda. We were never able to drink soda [Laughs] so, not to say we didn't drink it when we were out and about, but that was not a common—I knew that wasn't common. On the other hand, in the bay area, some of my closest friends growing up, our neighbors, and some of my closest friends were of Chinese ancestry, and I learned a lot about food from them, because they really focused on, again, fresh food, made at home and even though they were—professional people, but they really paid a lot of attention to food. In fact, they used to call me their white daughter because I would go, like I was just part of their family, and we would go to China Town on Sunday night and have dinner, and they always said don't ask what it is, just try it, and there were some pretty far out things that I ate as a kid.

JE: That's great. So, that ties into the next question beautifully, because I'd like you to tell us what your fondest food memory is. It's a little bit more of a specific question, but maybe you could tell us what that was and why.

JM: OK, wow that's hard. Yeah, I have a lot of—I might say, just, when I travel, we travel a lot for fun, and for profession I guess too, but and then, one of the joys of travelling is eating good food, and I remember when we were in Oaxaca, Mexico, we took a class at this restaurant and the woman who runs it, the chef, who taught us, was also the chef who taught Rick Bayless. I'm forgetting the name of her restaurant, but it was really great because you spend the whole day, including going to the market, and cooking as a group, and learning about the ingredients, and learning about the cultural history behind them, and just working with other people and laughing. And at the end you sit down and eat this big meal you've created, and that was a great memory, and I've done similar things like that in other countries and find it, it's like a real fun way to get into a place.

JE: That's great, yeah food as a place is an interesting idea. Thank you. So as you grew up, you started to get into food sustainability, this idea of food sustainability. Could you tell us a little bit about what led to that, and how you got into it?

JM: Well, I think I didn't really put the food and sustainability together until just pretty recently to tell you the truth, I mean I'd been interested for a number of years on issues of sustainability, thinking about sustainability, in particular since I'm a philosopher, thinking about the ethics of sustainability and why we should care about the future, so sort of try and build out—what are our moral obligations to the future. And I've come to see it as a more complicated story. So I was interested in that, I was also interested in bioethics, I'm interested in human health, I'm interested in our health systems and so what was sort of—in thinking about sustainability I thought about the issues around climate change, climate change is kind of hard to get people very worked up about [Laughs] Right?

JE: [Laughs] Yeah—

JM: So people don't necessarily, they don't see it, we don't think we're experiencing it, of course we may not even experience the worst of it, in some regions, maybe in Arizona its going to be hotter and dryer, but a lot of us have enough money we can probably buffer ourselves from some of the worst of it. So how do you get people to kind of care about these issues? So that's when I started to think, rather than coming at climate, why not come at it through food? And then of course once I started thinking about food, as a sustainability problem, I started thinking about all the ethical issues around food, that aren't necessarily sustainability issues, but when you think about sustainability in a broader context they are. So social justice issues, and cultural sustainability and so on, right? So that's a kind of roundabout way of getting to it.

JE: Okay. So I read that your background is in ethics.

JM: Yes.

JE: And social justice.

JM: Yeah

JE: So is it fair to say that that kind of led into—

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I mean it turns out that food has all kind of ethical issues attached to it. I mean we're now in a lot of discussion about the climate or the ecological issues around food have to do with the carbon footprint, for example, around modern industrial ag. It's one of the biggest drivers in fact of climate change, right. So if we

changed our agricultural practices we could go a long way in solving that problem. But then there are all sorts of other issues. There's a lot of discussion around food deserts. So people in America—and that's the other thing, we certainly hate social justice and food in America. You see, we're the wealthiest country in the world. We produce more food than people in the world. In fact, we have so many calories, I think we have twice as many calories as every person in America needs, but we still have places, people that go hungry in America. We still have nutritional deficiencies, even if they have enough calories, or too many calories, is what we're finding, but they're eating food that's bereft of nutritional value, right? And sometimes that's because they live in a community that's a food desert. So they live in a community in which there's no grocery store that sells produce or that sells dairy products—so they might just live near some place that sells alcohol and soda. It's the 7-11, or it's the—So I guess what I came to is I thought wow, food is a kind of lens on a lot of ethical issues that I'm interested in.

JE: Great, great. So you use a term, food desert, which is, from my understanding, is an area that, like you said, doesn't have access to healthy or healthier foods. Could you say a little bit more about that, where can they found? Are they an inner city thing, or could they also be found in rural communities?

JM: Yeah, so food desert, people originally started noticing it in inner cities, when grocery stores were no longer—back when they had small corner grocery stores, those went away. We went to larger grocery stores, but they're not situated in urban centers, where there are poor people. And I'm not sure what the technical definition is, but the point is that people can't within easy access, walking, or a short drive or bus ride, can't access a major grocery store. And so there might be fast food joints, so there maybe a Burger King, there may be a 7-11, that sells candy bars, but the idea of a food desert is that its bereft of access to good food. Now, good point about is it just urban areas? No. One of the things they're finding is, we look at Navajo Nation and other non-Indian countries as well where people don't have good access, again, for miles and miles and miles, to any kind of healthy foods—produce. They might have convenience markets, but convenience markets, as we all know, are loaded up with potato chips, candy bars and, you know. So they're now mapping this, it's kind of interesting, because you can look at this. GIS mapping. You can look at food deserts in America, and there's a whole issue of why did this happen? And a lot of it has, at least in the cities, has to do with certain kinds of red lining, and sort of forcing minority people into certain areas, and white flight—so there is a history there of how this happened. I'm not a historian [Laughs], but I do know, and its an interesting question of why this happened and how do we solve it? How do we make sure, if we see something like food as a basic right, healthy food, as a basic right, how do we ensure that people all have access to it?

JE: Great, thank you. So, the next question has to do with you and sustainable food systems. But if you could just explain what a food system is, briefly.

JM: OK. So, a food system is this complex of everything from farmers to distributors to restaurateurs, all those points within that food moves, all the way back to waste—what we do with food waste, which is another problem. Because we have landfills that are filled with food waste because we waste forty percent of our food. So, food system is just this whole, system of all the ways in which we kind of input to output of food. And,

as you can imagine, its kind of a complex set of issues. We often focus in on farmers, but farmers work within the farm bill, for example, or certain lending practices—so its not just farmers doing their thing, they do it within a whole set of structures. So when we want to think about the food system, we have to think about it in that more—if we think there are problems with it, we have to kind of recognize that its a network of issues.

JE: Ok, great. So this next question ties in a little bit to the questions we've asked before, but how did you become interested in sustainable food systems, specifically.

JM: OK, so I became interested in sustainable food systems by seeing centrally how food impacts the environment. So if we want to worry about our effect on the natural environment, currently and for future generations, then we need to look at our food system. Look at how agriculture is conducted and how that whole system works. Right now we've got, for example, incentives to big ag that's often working against smaller, say, organic producers, who might be better for ecological reasons if we invested in them rather than big agriculture.

JE: So is there some specific catalyst that got you involved in this or specific idea?

JM: So I was part of a group that the IHR organized. They got a melon grant that was to look at the humanities contribution to the problems of the Anthropocene. So we all know, what this, or maybe we don't know, this problem of the Anthropocene and rather than seeing the problems of the Anthropocene as kind of a science or engineering problem, humanists have been arguing that no these are really problems that people in the humanities need to be part of, thinking about, and working on solutions. So I was part of that group, and with that group, a group of us out of that started thinking about, rather than thinking about it at sort of an abstract level, taking the problem of food and saying what can humanity say about the problem of our food system. Which as I say is a big contributor to the problems of the Anthropocene.

JE: Right, Okay. Great. So, this is all based on the idea of food sustainability, and maybe could you explain what food sustainability means to you?

JM: Okay, well food sustainability means to me, I've thought about it in terms of five different values. [Laughs] Maybe that's too complicated.

JE: No, that's alright. [Laughs]

JM: [Laughs] Only academics break things down. [Laughs] It's a complicated system.

JE: Sure.

JM: [Laughs] Anyway, part of it is, I've been thinking about this and also I work with this group on it, and so what we came to is that there are different values that we want to preserve if we want a sustainable food system. And so, in thinking about that we articulated these five values. And what we mean by that is, if you want to build a sustainable food system in your community, what are the things that you should be paying attention to? What are the values you want to preserve? And again, partly is to get people to recognize that our system, who we support, who don't support, who gets food who doesn't, those represent values of ours, right? We can articulate those values and change the system based on it. Just as we've made other changes in society. We decided that we didn't want to necessarily pollute our air, so we put regulations in place. So we can change our behavior [Laughs] if we decide that something is of value, is of particular value of ours. So the values that I think are important for a sustainable food

system are first of all, that your food system preserve the historical and cultural traditions of a place. So that food is more than just energy [Laughs] that it really is about meaning in people's lives. And its tied up with their culture, their history, and that isn't static. That changes. So those of us who come to say to Phoenix, and maybe we were from back east or something, it's certainly, yeah you live here for a while and then sort of Mexican food and some maybe indigenous ingredients start to filter into your cooking or—but that those sorts of food resonate in this place. And there's a reason for that. They grow well here, and they make sense in this climate. So the idea that if you want a sustainable food system, its also about sustaining culture. Culture is part of sustainability. And sometimes when I think people frame sustainability as just a kind of science problem, they're not recognizing that people don't want to just sustain the world, they want to sustain their traditions, their culture. So cultural sustainability is important. So that's the first value. The second value of a sustainable food system is maybe the more obvious one is ensuring that the food system is—ensures ecological integrity. Right now we have food practices that are—We're losing our soil. We're killing our bees, our pollinators. It's not sustainable. We don't have bees we don't have pollinators. People have been saying, and there are changes here and there, but we need to think about it. If we look here in the Southwest, in particular in Arizona, where we have limited amount of water, and water is tied to energy because we have to pump it. All those things we have to think about—what should we be growing here, and what shouldn't we? So we have practices in the valley and in Arizona—a story came out about the Saudis owning big farms out west where they were—when they bought the land, they bought the water rights and they're growing alfalfa, they send the alfalfa to Saudi Arabia to feed their cows so they have milk.

JE: Oh wow.

JM: Does that sound like a sustainable practice? [Laughs] We don't have a lot of water, alfalfa is a big water sucker, but also that alfalfa is not staying here, either. So you've got the carbon footprint of taking it over. So that doesn't seem like a good practice. We need to think about these things. And that goes to water rights, it goes to what should be practiced in certain areas. So that's the second value. The third value is practices that cultivate and sustain human health. So if we think about wanting to have a sustainable food system, we want one that really does encourage healthy habits and health in humans. So again we have these problems of, we have communities in Phoenix that have fifty percent diabetes, type two diabetes in their children. In their children.

JE: Wow.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So in many in the Indian communities and the Latino communities, and even in white communities. In some of those communities its devastating the kind of impact, and that is related to food. Somebody's not putting something in the water. That its related to our food system, and also access to good exercise, but really food is a big driver in the diabetes problem. So we've got a food system where we're making it cheap for people to eat empty calories which results in these kinds of health problems. So that seems to me another value. Designing a food system that really encourages and preserves human health. A fourth value is food justice and social justice. A sustainable system has to be one in which people have access to food throughout food deserts.

Many people go hungry every day in America, a surprising number of them, more than most people are aware of. A lot of kids are on free lunch and often that's the only meal they get every day. There's schools that actually give kids bags of food on Friday to take home for the weekend because they know that they don't have any food at home. That shouldn't happen in this country. So thinking about that issue is an important one. But also thinking about social justice issues in workers throughout the system. When we think of farm workers having not only a living wage, but also not living in an environment where pesticides are dumped on them and their kids. And we've all heard some of the horrors of workers in the meat packing industry, the dangers involved in that, and also the exploitation of those people. So its sort of throughout the system. We should have a system where this is about our food, but we want to make sure that people within the food system are treated decently. And I would put in there as well that that system treats animals in a humane and caring way. It seems to me that if we want to use animals for our food system, we should demand that it also lives up to our standards of what decent treatment for animals, and humane treatment. Right now we kind of segregate out, how we treat pets, which we—you know, and then excluded from that, kind of cruel treatment is farm animals and I think it's just been easy for people to sort of turn a blind eye, but from a values point of view, that seems like not a good idea.

JE: Right, great.

JM: Do you want to hear what my last value is? [Laughs]

JE: Yes! Please. [Laughs]

JM: You're probably going "Oh my god!" [Laughs]

JE: I was just counting in my head, "I think that's four. You've got one more. Okay." [Laughs]

JM: This is the lecture on food.

JE: No, this is great stuff, thank you.

JM: Anyway, so the fifth value is this idea of food sovereignty, which is a bit of a buzz word, so I was a little worried about using that term.

JE: Right.

JM: I mean it's being used in different kinds of contexts and it does mean different things. What I mean by it is that rather than just having a kind of the right outcome or a just outcome or the good outcome, that people have a say in the process. So that the food system is—right now I think that a lot of people feel helpless in our food system. They send their kids to school and the kids eat crappy stuff at lunch and then the TV sells their kids more stuff, and then they can't, you know you find out, someone was just telling me the other day there's sawdust in our parmesan cheese. There's all these things that you find that they don't have to label. Someone was also telling me that red wine, some cheap red wine, puts die in it, so there's a way in which our system is not transparent and people don't have a sense—they don't' feel like they're in control. So for me it's about participatory justice or participatory, or being able to participate in the process. To have a say in the system. To have a say in what goes on, and have a right to transparency, and this is, you know we've all heard about the labeling issue with GMOs, it seems like it's a labeling issue about everything. Why shouldn't we be able to know what's in our food. I mean you would assume that just is what's in it is what you think was in it, but we found out that's not always true. So I do think that that final value is all

of us care about being able to kind of control what happens to us and our family and our community. Right now there's often a sense that these big corporations are kind of controlling it, and that's not to make them out to be evil demons, but the point is, there is a sense in which there are kind of closed room—door deals being done in Congress and it's not always working out for the advantage of people.

JE: Right. That's very interesting and so I think it's fair to say then that sustainability goes beyond just conservation.

JM: Yes.

JE: When you first hear the word sustainability there's sort of a tendency to think conservation or preservation. Maybe you could say a little bit more about what that means.

JM: Good, yeah that's a good point, that conservation isn't just about kind of preserving or conserving natural systems. I mean this is one of the sort of debates that has gone on, and maybe is still going on to some degree, is whether or not humans are part of nature or humans are not part of nature. I come down on the, look, humans are part of nature and so if we're conserving or preserving natural systems we better preserve them with us in it. [Laughs] Because we don't have any place to go. And I also think the other view of—we take humans out of the environment, that's not to say—I'm certainly in favor of preserving wilderness areas and so on, but I also think that what we need to spend a lot of our ethical kind of brain power and time thinking about built environments, including agricultural environments, and recognize that we're preserving them with us in it. So it seems to me that sustainability is not just about sustaining eco systems, but is sustaining eco systems with us in it. And of course us in it, we are cultural beings, and we want to preserve and sustain our cultures, our values. And so one of the things we try to do is pass on to the next generation, not only ecosystems that aren't destroyed, but also values that we think are important. So we think in America we're passing on our democratic traditions, we're passing on our food traditions to our next generation. So that's, I think that wider frame of sustainability, to me is a more accurate one. And I think it—then you can build in things that impact natural systems, like food.

[Sirens]

JE: Wait for that go guy by. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah this is a busy street.

JE: That's alright. Well great, thank you. That's very helpful. So the next question sort of gets back to your background, your educational background and your community that you grew up in. Were you ever involved in any kind of sustainable organization growing up?

[Break in the recording]

JE: Ok, so just too sort of repeat the question. Growing up and when you were going through your education, were you ever involved in any kind of sustainable organization in your school or in your community?

JM: Well, I do remember the first Earth Day, in the bay area, going out and cleaning the beaches, and there had been an oil slick, and cleaning up the birds. I do remember that. And of course I always thought of myself as an environmentalist, but I don't know that I was actually involved in—I can't think of being involved—I always feel like nowadays

people do way more service volunteering. When I was a kid [Laughs] were pretty self-centered! [Laughs] I don't remember doing any of that. I'm always surprise with my students who come in and they've already saved the world and they're only eighteen. (Laughs) Yeah so, sorry I don't have anything to say about that.

JE: No, that's great. But you were cognizant of things—

JM: Yes. Yeah, I mean that was sort of the early days in the seventies I remember, some of it when I was still in secondary school, primary and secondary school, about sort of those early—Earth Day, and people—that awareness of our impact on the planet and that we really need to change how we relate to the world. And it certainly has come a long way from there. Sort of the anti-littering message, and the oil slicks in California, and the impact of that on— [Sirens] coastlines.

JE: There's a disaster outside [Laughs].

JM: Yeah, I wonder what's going on there [Laughs].

JE: Great! That's fantastic. So part of this program that you've helped put together has the purpose of building bridges with other activists and organizations. How do you go about doing that?

JM: Ok, so we—what grew out of this original group, from our humanities contribution to the Anthropocene, was the idea, our group wanted to figure out how we could really collaborate and learn from people in the community. Often universities have this relationship to the community that they're around, or other communities, We're sort of the experts. We're the people who know stuff and we're going to go tell you what to do. I think that model is really [Laughs] is wrong and distorts the picture. I think there's a lot of local knowledge out there. A lot of really creative insightful people out there. The problem is trying to devise processes or procedures to be able to learn from each other. So this idea of collaborative learning, or how it is we can get people with different, not only different information, but different ways of knowing things too. So the idea of different epistemologies. How do we get those people to work on problems together? So one of the interesting things about something like food, and other problems in society, is that there—what other academics are calling wicked problems. The idea of that is that people come to the problem and sort of think about what the problem is differently. And so, when we were just talking about food, we were saying, there's a problem of food scarcity or food insecurity and that there's a problem of treatment of workers in the system. So there's all these different problems and different people are going to think that's the problem of food in America. And so one thing is that the idea of wicked problems, you don't have to resolve all those issues. People can come at the problem from different kind of vantage points, but you could still come together and think about it. And you're not going to resolve the problem, but you might alleviate it, push it down, make it better, and then keep iterating that process and working on it. So that was the idea of trying to design a process by which we could collaborate with the people in the community. And I wouldn't want to call them all activists. Some of them are farmers. Some of them work in food banks. Some of them are people who work for the government, working in farm policy. Some are working on children's access to food in the school. So the idea is that all these people have expertise, have a vantage point, and are all concerned about the food system. And so part of it is trying to think up a

process by which we can learn from one another and come to solutions for the food problems of our area.

JE: Great. So are there any techniques or strategies that you use on the ground to reach out to different organizations or different activists, people?

JM: Well, we've been reaching out—part of it is—you've got a few people who are intrigued with the ideas and they know people, and they connect us with other people. So part of it is or—there's somebody who does something and we think, Oh we should contact that person because we need that sort of perspective or that kind of expertise. And so the idea is sort of just mushrooming out. I hope we're not, leaving any big gaps in the process. One of the things that I've thought is if we—as we proceed ahead, and we're going to have this event Dinner 2040, event, where we're all going to get together, but I've thought that that might be a process of iterating that process. So that it's not just, we do it once and we solve it, because I don't think we're going to solve the problem, but the idea that we've set up a process. And we've also made a lot of connections, and they've made connections with each other, so it's not like they have to conduit back through us. But the point is that we've sort of set up a forum. We've set up a mechanism that people, diverse people from different areas can sit down and explore the topic together and really listen to each other.

JE: Great. Great. Thank you. So why do you think—it sounds like one of the goals is to build a solid network then. An expansive network to get everybody thinking along the same lines, and why do you think that's important for the future of food. It's sort of a simple question, but what do you think?

JM: So—the problem of food is not going to be solved, well it's not going to be solved, [Laughs] by the university, and it's not going to be solved by one person. And it's probably not going to be solved permanently anyway, but the point is we can make it better if we have these different vantage points and different perspectives. And as I say some of those perspectives may even see the problem differently but that's not to say we can't find some sorts of things that we can say "Yeah we ought to work on getting that done, and this done." The point is there's some points that people can see are real problems and I think getting people to see that they can have a voice in the system is really going to go a long way to changing the system, because I think people feel pretty disempowered.

JE: Right. So that brings up another question then, because it seems like with this network and with all the involvement, people might have different priorities of what problem is the biggest, what should we solve now, what can we solve now. So how do you decide how to go about that? How do you identify which problem to address and if there's an order how do you decide that order?

JM: That's a good question. What we decided to do was to focus on twenty-five years out. Rather than looking at all the problems of the food system, which we can name, hundreds of them, and we kind of know a lot of them. Why don't we as a group, envision what we'd like it to look like in twenty-five years. What would we like it to look like? Now I think that people would agree that we need to have these values that I set out as parameters, but what do we want it to look like? I mean how do we want it to function? So there's all these kind of details, so let's kind of play around with that idea

of envisioning Dinner 2040, that's our idea, let's look at what the food system would look like, what dinner would we eat in 2040. And then the idea is to engage in this kind of process that's referred to as a charrette, where you do what is called back casting. So the idea is you want to get some place in twenty-five years, what would you have to have in place five years from now, ten years from now, fifteen years from now, and so on. Because if you want to be a brain surgeon, [Laughs] you don't just get there. You go, "Oh first of all I've got to get an undergraduate degree, and then I've got to—" So you have your end in goal, and you could map out what are all the steps you have to do, including a fellowship and a dudududududu…right? So the idea is that you would do something like that. So that's the basic idea, is that you get people to see, Ok we're not going to get there tomorrow, but what can we do to get on the path?" [Laughs] And what are those steps? Now that is a complicated issue. I'm not saying it's easy. But I think it gets people, first of all seeing that change doesn't happen overnight, but change does happen if you start it. And you also start to see how things could get in place in a few years, and how that would allow you to get to the next step and the next step. Now that still doesn't address priorities. Some things may fall out. In order to have one thing happen we have to change a law, or we have to get a distribution network with some refrigerated trucks that would get food that would spoil to poor people, right? So there are some things that we might come to. And the point is not to come to a kind of big consensus on everything, but rather to see that there are—that people, even people who are in diverse areas, might hear an issue that you think is really important, and "Hey I didn't know about that issue. I didn't know that was happening. Yeah we ought to think about how to resolve that." So some of that is kind of consciousness raising, just learning about what some of the issues are and how we start to solve them. So this little even isn't going to change everything, but part of it is seeing that we need to have processes like this in place if we're going to make real change.

JE: Right. And so, you talk about obstacles or challenges that could come up. Can you identify any specific challenges that you've already come up against in regards to food sustainability?

JM: Well, there are, like a lot of problems, there are entrenched economic incentives in place. Again, you don't have to vilify big companies necessarily, but the point is those are powerful forces, and they're hard to change. It's sort of like you've got a big cruise liner and you're trying to turn it around, people say this about big ag in America, industrial agriculture it's a big thing to turn around. And that's where, you may not have to—you don't have to do all that, but you can start to do smaller things, bigger change comes from small change. And I think if you think you have to change the whole thing, well for one thing, that's not how change happens, right? It does happen by people showing a different way, other people getting interested in it. But, the food industry has become a big business, and it has become a big global business. So if a community wants to change it you're up against those kinds of things. So that seems to me a big issue. There are a lot of challenges [Laughs]. It may be—and of course what I'm coming at it—I'm a philosopher, I'm in the humanities, and this whole project and this idea was that—is trying to keep it in people's minds that these are not solely technical problems. To keep it in people's minds that food is more than just a technical problem. And I think

that we got sort of sidetracked in our food system when we started looking at it just a kind of science problem. "Oh look at all the food we're producing, using all these calories!" But look at what the result was, as opposed to seeing food as connected up with culture and meaning and place and all those other things that—the way we all experience food. [Laughs] We don't experience it—maybe there's a few nutty athletes who just think about when they're taking their protein powder, but most of us think about it for taste and experience, and sitting with people and eating food and all the other kinds of joys of food in our lives.

JE Right. Great, so that brings us now to the project that we've been referring to throughout the interview which is Dinner 2040. Could you tell us what that is specifically?

JM: Yeah, so this is the project that grew out of our project here at ASU. And the idea of it is to take humanists and other artists and with community people in the food system in various ways—everything from farmers to food bank workers, to legislators, to all the people that impact the food system and get them together to envision what our food system should look like in twenty-five years. So we planned an event in November in which we'll have people come out to an urban farm that we'll have the event. And we're going to have people at different tables and there'll be mixed tables of people representing different aspects of the food system and there'll be a humanist there, and we'll really work through this idea of, first kind of envisioning as a group what we want to see, and of course along the way with that envisioning people are going to bring up, "What's wrong with this system?" [Laughs] But part of it is to have that kind of spilling out of ideas. They talk about faucet thinking—you just sort of get the ideas out and don't sort of over think it. And then the idea is to go through another couple of steps. One might look at what are some of the challenges to getting there and then finally what steps can we take to get there? Sort of thinking of that back-casting idea of what do we need to do now? What do we need to do in five years? So the idea is that you as a group, kind of work through what are some of the things we can do to start on that road to getting to that envisioned place. So we see this as an idea of we mentioned sort of consciousness raising, learning from one another, sharing what people's views about what the problem are and what some of the challenges are. But then also, really thinking together about how we make change, and how we make a more positive food system going forward.

JE: Great, so how long would you say, you and the other people involved, how long have you been working on this?

JM: Well, we've been working on it actually a couple of years now. As I say, we started out by doing this as part of this larger project, and then we actually held a charrette a couple of years ago, and worked with some community members, some local farmers, and we went through the charrette process and we developed meals that we would eat in 2040. So there where were sort of focused on, what would a meal look like? And we found that the process really worked. It was very evocative, and allowed people to work together in a really constructive way and develop interesting solutions.

JE: Ok. What was the reasoning behind the twenty-five years? Why 2040?

JM Yeah, so why twenty-five years? When you're talking about sustainability, one of the challenges of talking about sustainability is what scale are we talking about? Sometimes people talk about scales, we talk to people who work in nuclear power for example. They're often talking—I mean nuclear waste will be around for—I mean they talk about things like ten thousand years, twenty thousand years that waste will still be there. That's a kind of scale that I think is so out of human framework that I don't think it's very productive to talk in those very large scales of time. Often people refer to that as geological time as opposed to human time. So thinking about it, I'm a moral philosopher, so trying to think of what is that can motivate people morally to act in certain ways. I think we're morally motivated when we can sort of connect emotionally and to some degree intellectually we can understand what things will be like. And we also feel like we kind of emotionally connect, that I think the twenty-five-year frame makes sense in that way. It's our children, maybe it's our grandchildren depending on our—and it's us! Right? I mean, a lot of us feel like we'll still be around in twenty-five years. Some people maybe not. The point is you don't feel like it's something you won't experience, or your kids won't experience. So—and I think another aspect of this, and this is something I'm learning from my history colleagues, is that looking back twenty-five years from now, our food system that we have now was created by policies that were put in place twenty-five years ago. So there is an effect on where we are now, from what happened twenty-five years ago. This is where history comes in, you can see that what we do now, really is going to impact us going forward. What policy decisions we make, how we treat the soil, how we treat our water supply, what we do with migrant labor. All these things, we had policies twenty-five years ago and got us in this situation and what we do now. So twenty-five years has a lot of I think residence in that way, and there really is a historical argument for thinking in that chunk of time.

JE: Right, so it sounds like the Dinner 2040 project has a practicality to it. A lot of times when you hear about environmental movements, the critique is that it's unreasonable. Is that an intent that you had, and the other folks that helped you start this, is that you wanted to have a very practical outlook, something that people could relate to?

JM: Yeah, I think that some environmentalists have put themselves so far out in terms of human concerns that they often—I mean I think that one of the ways the radical environmentalist came up is that because they were some people claiming that they'd rather save a rattlesnake rather than a human or something. So it's sort of that idea that humans are sort of parasitic on the environment, and that seems to me not accurate, and not pragmatic. I mean if we want to see real change in how we protect and conserve the environment, then we need to see that humans are part of that environment. Humans are part of that environment, and we live here, and so we need to figure out ways to have a kind of ethic about that use. So one of the reasons I'm always attracted to Aldo Leopold's work is that he talks about the land ethic, and it really is a—he was focused to a large extent on how farmers and other people who use the land, how they use the land, and saw them as major conservationists. So it's not about just preserving wilderness, and again, I'm not against wilderness, but I think we do a lot more for the environment if we figure out systems for taking care of the land we use.

JE: Right, so you're trying to involve not just humanists and academic folks, but also people who maybe use the land as a way of life, whereas, many humanists and academics sort of see the land as either recreational thing or sometimes a religious thing or a spiritual thing. But you're trying to add a practical element to it to involve as many people as possible. Is that fair to say?

JM: Yeah, I think we need to—in focusing on a land ethic we need to not only think about preserving wild areas for recreation, spiritual renewal, and even biodiversity, but rather that we need to think about those environments in which we inhabit. And that—humans always inhabited wilderness, I mean this is sort of the mythology—Native people lived there! So it wasn't without people. But that became kind of the mythical view that the colonists got on to and of course pushed Native people out so they could preserve wilderness, rather than seeing that those people lived in those environments. But we live—so there's wilderness and there's also agrarian landscapes. We have farmers and ranchers using the land. We have these urban landscapes, we have urban landscapes and this whole continuum of landscapes, most of which, all of which we're in, except for maybe Antarctica or something. So we need to think about the land ethic in all those contexts. We need to think about urban environments and how we can use those in responsible ways, including I think, more and more about people are talking having food systems, growing food in those urban environments as well as suburban environments. Again, how can we integrate food systems into our built environments, and then all the way out to agrarian contexts and ranch contexts.

JE: Great, thank you. Tell me about your role in Dinner 2040.

JM: OK, well I maybe became sort of the unwitting leaders of the group [Laughs] which I'm not really—I don't know how—but anyway, I—it was an intriguing idea, and I'm a philosopher so I don't necessarily do a lot of community work, although I've enjoyed what we've done so far, and I actually learned a lot from getting to know farmers and policy makers and people working in the food system. So I already feel like I'm a beneficiary of this process because I have a committee of people I'm working with and we also had that first charrette, so I really have learned a lot and it's taught me that the academy needs to open up and really figure out processes where we can get the community engaged in the research. Not just in the way we sometimes do it where it's kind of bring one community member in and then not really listen to them [Laughs]. But really see them as having a kind of knowledge that is important, and that we can learn from and that we probably have something we can contribute too. But the point is we can really learn from one another. So I sort of ended up sort of the leader of this group, and then I started thinking of these values and sort of was able to articulate those five values, because as a moral philosopher I think about values [Laughs]. And I thought that it makes sense to get people to see that their food system—we often talk about when you make consumer choices that there's a value behind it. You may not know it, but try get people often articulate what they're doing when they do it, and I think in this way I'd like to have people when they think about the food system to recognize sort of the values involved in that. So if you buy a—there's more and more attention to how animals are raised, you buy products that are raised in a way that the animals are treated cruelly, you should recognize it. You're part of that process now, and you can

chose to do otherwise. And even things like organic food, and there's a big debate whether it's better for you or not, I think it's pretty clear it's better for the environment, so it's better for you, it's better for the environment, [Laughs] it's better for the soil, it's better for the environment. So you might buy it on that ground. So you might buy it on that ground. You might say, "It's a little more expensive, but I want to participate," so the point is you're using your dollars to express your values. So that was my role, or has been, to really try to keep those values front and center. And it's not a hard sell, I just think people haven't thought about it. They haven't thought there's all these values floating around with what they eat, and so on.

JE: Great. So why would you say Dinner 2040 is important to the community?

JM: Well I think communities, and we're going to do this in Phoenix, and I think other communities should do something similar, that it's important that the community get engaged in what their food system looks like and also get empowered to make the change, right. Because I think there's a lot of feeling dissatisfied, and feeling that it's a bit out of control, and it's not what they want for them or their kids or even their communities. And I think that this process will have that one outcome of just having people recognize that there is a role that they can play, and there's obviously multiple things that that might mean. But the point is you're not—that you can have—that you can be empowered in this system.

JE: Great. So you said that this project is centered on Phoenix?

JM: What we were doing was, or are doing I guess you could say, is we like to think of this process of Dinner 2040 as kind of a template, or model. So what we're hoping is that other communities will take it on. We've had a few communities kind of say they were going to do it, and so we're hoping that they will. And the idea is that the other communities would say, Hey let's look at our food system. Let's get together some humanists, and artists, and farmers, and some policy—all the people that you think you ought to have at that meeting and have them get together and go through this process. And again, we're trying to make it kind of a positive process of envisioning the future and then talking about how we get there.

JE: Right. Are you aware of any other communities or any other places in the country that are doing something similar? Or is this unique to—

JM: I think that this—well there are places that are talking about the future of food. I don't—haven't seen anybody doing it—stablishing a kind of date and then (laughs). But people are kind of talking about it more generally about the future of food. Some of that is more writ large, it's—in fact at John Hopkins they're doing a project designing the future global food system at a much more kind of global level. I know the guy that's working on that. I am pretty convinced now that though there are more national and international issues I think there's an importance in getting communities engaged and making sure there are community solutions. And I don't think that every solution that would be— that we shouldn't universalize the solution, otherwise you run over culture and history. You run over place-based ecological differences. So the problem is when we do that, we import certain foods to grow here that worked in the Midwest, they're great in the Midwest, you've got lots of water and a whole different soil composition, blah blah blah. So I think we have to be careful about that idea of scalability or taking a

solution that works in one place and doing it in another place. So the degree to which this is scaleable, the template could work other places that we could take it, and other communities could use it, and that starts them on a process of planning and that's really what this is about.

JE: Great, and you said that some other communities are sort of paying attention to this. Do you mind sharing?

JM: Yeah, so I think one—I think it's—we had people from around the country that were part of our group. I think one is Eugene, Oregon. And [thinks] a town in Illinois, where the University of Illinois is—

JE: Oh—

JM: That's embarrassing I can't think of what the name is.

JE: Is it Urbana?

JM: It might be Urbana, anyway—

JE: Somewhere in Illinois.

JM: Somewhere in Illinois. And then I thought another one of our group was in Taiwan and that in Taiwan they were thinking about taking it on. So we haven't really made a big push to get it out there. I think as we go forward, and in particular once we do ours, we can sort of push it out through social media. Our idea was to almost see if communities might take it on as a sort of challenge. To have their community do it too, and then post their results. And so part of this is we'd like to have a website, where we could post our outcomes but also our ongoing efforts, but also then if other communities were doing it we could post their results as well.

JE: Great, so it's just expanding that network then.

JM: Yeah. Yeah, and through social networks and so on we could push out the idea. I mean that's part of it, is just getting people to hear about it and to know about it.

JE: So the last one, the last question is sort of a personal question, but what does Dinner 2040 mean to you? You can handle this any way you want. [Laughs]

JM: Well I mean it started out as kind of an academic exercise, we were part of an academic group on a project, and we were talking about multiple epistemologies, and we were talking about all kinds of highfalutin stuff. Now it's become very community-engaged, and a lot of people are excited about it. And so it's really for me it's been kind of a personal journey of meeting people in the food system in the valley, and hearing about their stories and hearing about their excitement around this idea. And so that's been personally gratifying that we've pushed this out there and it seems to be resonating. We have chefs that are interested in working with us on it, we have people who want to come and want to participate in it. So it's kind of developed into something that resonates with people. And I think it's partly—there's something kind of evocative about the idea of dinner in twenty-five years, and also thinking about our role in making something good happen. And again, there's something about thinking about the positive and how we attain sustainability rather than focusing on all the things that's wrong with our system. In a way it doesn't give you a kind of vision of where we want to go. So I think this has been something that I didn't really expect to be that enticing, but it's turned out to be. In fact a group of us through GEOs, through the Food Systems Transformation Initiative went to Africa to work with young African agricultural

entrepreneurs, a few hundred of them, and I ran a workshop there and did this process with them and it was very fascinating because getting them to think in their context, and these are young people who have ideas either to be farmers or to be somehow in the agricultural chain, supply chain, that they think about where they want their food system to be in twenty five years. And they have, you know think of challenges, I mean, real challenges, but it was a really engaged conversation. We had about sixty of them, at tables working together and again, it was, they really got energized thinking about where they wanted to go in twenty-five years. And then it got them thinking about what they could do to get there. How they could see their role in it. And so it was kind of exciting to see this idea at work in an entirely different context.

JE: Great. Alright well thank you so much for all this.

JM: Sure!