

## INTRODUCTION

One of the first pigs I encountered in my ethnographic research was an enormous boar with a thick mottled coat. With coloring that vaguely resembled that of a calico cat, he was the sire of a great many hogs that would be “grown out” (or raised) and taken to market by Eliza MacLean of Cane Creek Farm, then located in Snow Camp, Alamance County, North Carolina. He went by the name of Bill Clinton (but known on the farm as just Clinton).

Clinton is no longer with us, though his legacy lives on in one of his equally prodigious offspring, Junior. Pigs like Clinton and Junior have become iconic today of efforts to re-create industrial food systems, to revitalize—or perhaps reinvent—commitments to slow and local foods. This commitment speaks not only to the conditions of these animals’ production and the regional practices associated with their husbandry, but also to their eventual consumption as pork. Chefs and food enthusiasts of all kinds across the United States are engaged in a bit of a pig romance (see, for example, Dickerman 2006), since the many and varied ways in which pork can be prepared or used to enrich a host of other dishes—from lardy confit of root vegetables to maple bacon doughnuts—is now a well-established dimension of contemporary American cuisine. When I asked a well-regarded chef and a regular customer of Cane Creek what attracted him to pigs like those sired by Clinton, he was less concerned with their ancestry than with their flavor. He told me he was “looking for a pig



Fig 1.1 Clinton, a large Farmer's Hybrid boar (foreground).

with some fat on it.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, fat is not just a question of the flavor of the pork, it is also a vital physiological component of the pig’s life—so production and consumption join together in their common concern for excellent fat.

If we take a moment to consider Clinton, we can see that he possessed a number of qualities that were critical to his own life and to the community of farmers, chefs, and consumers that were interested in him. How did Clinton get to be a pig with fat? At his heaviest, indeed, he weighed close to a thousand pounds. But are pigs not always fat? And if not, why not? If a chef is looking for a fat pig, perhaps that suggests that only certain types of pigs—pigs of a certain stock or lineage—can be counted on to yield sufficiently fat pork. Or perhaps it simply means that any pig can become a suitably fat pig if it is raised in the proper fashion. What might it mean for pigs to come in recognizable types—in Clinton’s case, the Farmer’s Hybrid variety? How does this question of pig classification relate to the desirability of the pork the animals yield? Problems like these are often understood in terms of yet other qualities, like being “natural” or “heritage.” Moreover, these esteemed qualities of heritage and breed are very much a part of the material dimensions of Clinton’s life, as well as of the conditions in which he was produced and reproduced. The fact, for example, that Clinton had a thickly bristled coat made it possible for him and his descendants to be raised outdoors. Even in inclement weather, in places like northern Iowa and Sweden, hairy pigs such as these can endure bitter cold with only straw

for bedding. Just as important, hairy pigs can survive the often scorching summers of places like North Carolina. It turns out that pigs will get terribly sunburned without this hairy protection, though they also need adequate wallows in their pasture to keep cool since pigs cannot sweat. Furthermore, pigs raised outdoors get a good amount of exercise, which often means they “grow out” a little more slowly than other pigs, which also require substantially different conditions of production.

A fat pig like Clinton, then, possesses a host of related qualities. And all of these characteristics speak to the relationship between place and time, as well as that between history and community. Such qualities are markedly valued by the categories of slow and local food, which explicitly connect value and region to heritage and taste as well. What is generally less noted, however, is how relevant such qualities are to the ways in which communities are put together and often drawn apart. The relationships that shape communities—in the contemporary United States overall and perhaps especially in North Carolina, which has undergone a tremendously rapid transformation in recent decades—are often brought to the fore when matters of locality, history, and even aesthetic judgments about things like taste are the focus of social movements like those centered on pasture-raised pork and local food. I argue that these projects and practices raise critical questions of class—in particular, questions that anthropologists have been asking about food (specifically, its meanings, value, and availability) for a very long time.

The contemporary practices centered on pasture-raised pigs in the Piedmont of North Carolina are the focus of my account in this book. The pigs in the Piedmont raise problems relating to the transformation of place and the ways we inhabit it. They exemplify people’s interests in praising the virtues of heritage, as well as capitalizing on its cachet. Promoting forms of value like heritage also depends on developing and circulating ways of knowing this value, so I pay attention to the various modes of discernment embodied by artisanal producers as well as selective consumers that contribute to the qualities that make for good pigs and good pork. Above all, farmers in the Piedmont as well as customers shopping for pork from healthy and happy pasture-raised pigs are in search of “the real thing,” a phenomenon and an experience with unique characteristics that are in some ways irreducible and that make them worth seeking out. In this way, a concern for authenticity is a prominent feature of this work. I explore authenticity—the commitment to producing, preserving, distributing, and consuming “real” pigs—throughout this book. Authenticity is plainly an

ethnographically observable motivation,<sup>2</sup> but it is also a complex symbolic form that I argue needs to be better theorized, rather than dissolved as epiphenomenal in a constructivist framework of invented traditions and fetishized commodities. This book winds through multiple sites and practices—a host of elaborate locales—across the North Carolina Piedmont to detail these themes of place, discernment, heritage, and artisanship, all of them held to be authentic. My aim is to describe and analyze the ways that many people’s commitments to the reinvention of food are realized and contested through what they consider to be (as my title reveals) *Real Pigs*—that is, lively pigs that yield delicious pork, all possessed of an authentic character. In the remainder of the introduction, I spell out the theoretical orientations and methodological practices that have guided my research on these matters.

### An Anthropology of Food

Anthropology has had no shortage of works dedicated to the study of food. As Judith Farquhar notes, “for anthropology from its inception, food has been good to think with” (2006, 146). The past fifteen years or so have seen a true explosion in the literature that relates food to sociocultural questions (for numerous examples, see Holtzman 2006; Mintz and Dubois 2002; Sutton 2010). My approach to the study of food is part of an effort to bring political economic and phenomenological concerns into a common framework. A number of works have looked at the way that food has played a central role in the reordering of social relations and, in particular, in the production and consolidation of relations of social hierarchy. Preeminent among these is Sidney Mintz’s pathbreaking *Sweetness and Power* (1985). In his historically grounded text, Mintz describes the ways that sugar production generated very specific conditions of enslaved labor in the Caribbean; shows how this mode of production provided a template for industrialized labor in the British metropole; and shows how the sugar produced by the industrialized plantation transformed the British diet in ways that both facilitated the creation of a resource-limited and time-disciplined working class and made that class dependent on a cheap, abundant, stimulating, and drug-like food.

Mintz’s work—like the many works drawing directly or indirectly on it (Gewertz and Errington 2010; Nestle 2013; Patel 2007; Schlosser 2001)—provides a model for thinking about how the production, circulation, and consumption of foods can come to embody transforming regimes

of hierarchy and labor, inculcating innovative and compelling tastes while also consolidating the power of those who stand to profit from these regimes. While this analysis is more directly relevant to the industrial confinement pork I discuss in chapter 1, it does form an important backdrop to the pastured-pork practices I address here. At the same time, I am reluctant to portray American consumers of industrial foods as the benighted dupes that Mintz's work and the literature following it often make them out to be. Even some of the most erudite and committed farmers I work with eat foods from a variety of sources and cannot scrupulously restrict themselves to only local food. One farmer likes to joke about taking long trips across the state to processors or customers and tells me how she stops at Bojangles for a sausage biscuit—or, as she puts it, “some of their confinement pork.” Moreover, the reflexive implications of ideological critiques like those inspired by Mintz's work not only suggest a misrepresentation of consumers' motives and values, but they also preserve a place of exception for the critics, who are somehow sophisticated, enlightened, or self-disciplined enough to withstand the inescapable grip of industrial foods on our diets. As Julie Guthman asks in her trenchant critique of these perspectives, “if junk food is everywhere and people are naturally drawn to it, those who resist it must have heightened powers. When Pollan waxes poetic about his own rarefied, distinctive eating practices, the messianic, self-satisfied tone is not accidental. In describing his ability to overcome King Corn, to conceive, procure, prepare, and serve his version of the perfect meal, Pollan affirms himself as a supersubject while relegating others to objects of education, intervention, or just plain scorn” (2007, 78).

From a broader perspective, what is missing from these now myriad popular press critiques of so-called industrial foods is a recognition of both the way that all foods—industrial, “real,” and otherwise—are enmeshed in a field of political economic forces<sup>3</sup> and the fact that all food-related activities are modes of cultural practice. The choice to pursue alternatives to industrial foods, or to look for niche-market meats, is not merely a mode of liberation from corporate structures of authority informed by rational insight. Quite aside from the facts that it is impossible to eat in only this way in the contemporary United States and that all consumers eat foods from a variety of sources, the interest in alternatives is itself a meaningful activity, motivated by a range of values that are themselves encoded in symbolically charged qualities materialized in food. Pasture-raised pork chops are not exempt from these processes of class struggle, nor are they simply the enlightened choices of conscientious consumers.

Mintz's work offers a useful—indeed, pathbreaking—paradigm that shows how to offer a historical perspective on a commodity supply chain. But his approach to the relationship between power structures and subjects' consciousness of consumption<sup>4</sup> reduces meaning to the reflex of a power-laden, but somehow symbolically transparent, process of production that is wholly separated from, yet still powerfully constrains, consumers who struggle to construct the inside meanings they attribute to commodity forms. A more promising, if still problematic, approach to the ways that food-related practices can articulate an order of political economic—and specifically class—relationships in a world of lived experiences (and not, as Mintz says, the mapping of working-class cultural meanings on economic goods) is offered by Pierre Bourdieu. His discussion of "The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles" (1984, 169–225) illuminates the way in which class dispositions are embodied<sup>5</sup> and do not simply reflect dominant structures of political economy, but rather constitute the often unconscious—or taken-for-granted—values of a hierarchical order by means of the practical activity of subjects. His discussion of the "taste of necessity" that is the centerpiece of his entire chapter demonstrates that necessity is not sufficient to account for a cheap, heavy, rich, fatty working-class cuisine (and especially the diet of working-class men), nor is this a taste (after the fashion of bourgeois lifestyle choices) that is merely a demonstration of the unsophisticated palate of proletarian rubes. Taste is neither a utilitarian calculation (according to which poor people economize and eat poor food) nor an absolute measure of sophistication (in this view, the more cosmopolitan one's experience, the more cultured one's preferences). Instead, it is a set of dispositions that does not simply conform to but actively constitutes (and so may transform, or reproduce—lest we forget that social orders do have a remarkable capacity to reproduce themselves) a habitus.

Bourdieu's discussion of fish in the working-class diet is a little gem of analysis of how this works, offering insights into the symbolic mediation of class and gender relations in the material characteristics of the food itself and—especially—in the embodied character of tastes, preferences, and the actual eating of a meal:

In the working classes, fish tends to be regarded as an unsuitable food for men, not only because it is a light food, insufficiently "filling," which would only be cooked for health reasons . . . but also because, like fruit (except bananas) it is one of the "fiddly" things which a man's

hands cannot cope with and which make him childlike . . . but above all, it is because fish has to be eaten in a way which totally contradicts the masculine way of eating, that is, with restraint, in small mouthfuls, chewed gently, with the front of the mouth, on the tips of the teeth (because of the bones). The whole masculine identity—which is called virility—is involved in these two ways of eating, nibbling and picking, as befits a woman, or with whole-hearted male gulps and mouthfuls. (1984, 190–91)

What I find especially compelling in this brief discussion is the way that Bourdieu pays special attention to the material properties of the food itself. Here, it is not simply the mode of sociality (collective, convivial versus atomistic, efficient), or the effects of the food (nourishing, satiating versus slimming, lightening) that are privileged dimensions of the working-class habitus,<sup>6</sup> but the material dimensions of this process of engagement (Weiss 1996) that allows the “fiddly” qualities of fish eating—embedded in the form of the fish as well as in the inept fingers of laboring men—to express and constitute the class-informed and gendered bodies of a hierarchically ordered habitus. Here, materiality and embodiment are each reflexive dimensions of one another, and their open-ended potentialities are fully realized only in their encounter (Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

In recent years a number of works in anthropology and related fields have taken up the wider challenge of joining political economic and phenomenological approaches to ethnographically based analyses in ways that build on the concerns with embodiment and materiality begun by Bourdieu, among others. In my view, the central dimension of the most compelling of these studies is a concern with quality as a feature of both material forms and the capacity for perception (Chumley and Harkness 2013; Fehérváry 2013; Keane 2003). Much of this work takes its impetus from Nancy Munn’s now-classic *The Fame of Gawa* (1986), which uses Charles Sanders Peirce’s understanding of “qualisigns” (1932) to describe the ways in which a system of values has been produced and ramified in a wider regional world on Gawa, an island in the Massim of Papua New Guinea. For Munn, qualities such as heaviness, quickness, and darkness are embedded in the sensuous character of a wide array of things and actions in the world. These shared qualities permit such phenomena to be joined together in practice to generate forms of value—that is, icons (or qualisigns) that share qualities of the productive processes (crafting, and

fabricating, but also transacting and consuming) through which they are created (Munn 1986, 17; see also Manning 2012, 12–13). In this way, we can grasp the social (or, as Munn refers to it, the “intersubjective” [1986, 9]) creation of value as embedded in the characteristics of the material world, performed in the course of social interaction, and embodied in the perceptions of active subject.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the relevance of quality as a mode of evaluation, how to go about tracing concrete qualities (especially in a complex process like raising pigs; processing, distributing, and marketing their pork; and then preparing and consuming this food as part of a meal or other dining practice) poses vexing theoretical and methodological questions. How, for example, might the quality of “natural” be registered as a sensuous quality in the course of feeding and watering a pig; then in the processing of its pork as a value-added product (for example, using sausage spices, smoking techniques, and cooking or curing methods); and finally in a chef’s preparation of, say, a grilled bratwurst? What allows participants in this nexus of activities to recognize the niche-market product in question as “natural” at every moment in this chain? And how might the meanings of “nature” be modified, reinterpreted, or translated from field to slaughter facility to menu? Robert Foster (2008) has offered an exceptional account of a commodity chain that is almost the perfect ideological opposite of that used with pasture-raised pork, the commodity chain of Coca-Cola. Foster also deploys a framework that is inspired by Munn’s (1977) interest in the perception and fabrication of qualities in the production of valued goods, conjoined with Michel Callon, Cécile Méadel, and Vololona Rabeharisoa’s (2002) understanding of the way in which diverse actors, often with very different, even contradictory interests, work to qualify and requalify products as they circulate across networks of dispersed actors participating in an “economy of qualities” (Foster 2008, 7). Furthermore, the qualities revealed in this expanding, iterative process of requalification does not entail just the sensuous appreciation of the material product—or the animals—conjoined in this economy; it also includes the perspective that different actors have on one another as they participate in this economy. For example,<sup>8</sup> a farmer may select for pigs that have a certain size or body type, and produce these animals because he or she imagines that local chefs will be looking for certain attributes in the pork they purchase from farmers. In turn, a chef may trim or season that pork in anticipation of what he or she assumes diners will expect of a pork chop in a restaurant, thereby requalifying that pork product in the process Foster (following

Hannerz 1999) describes as defining a “network of perspectives” that includes “perspectives that people in one place might have on people in another place as a result of their being aware of each other’s inclusion in the same translocal commodity network” (Foster 2008, xvi). To flesh this model out further, consider the following commonplace operation of this “network of perspectives.” Consumers at farmers’ markets, usually in a not-quite-translocal network, routinely demonstrate their assumptions concerning farmers’ activities by asking about the production techniques they use for raising their livestock (for example, “Are your pigs raised outdoors?” “Do you feed your chickens organic grains?” and “Do you use antibiotics?”). The presence of the farmer at the market serves to ratify (or not) these consumers’ qualifications (that is, the way in which they attribute significance to a pork product), and the host of ways in which they may present themselves to these customers (for example, wearing rustic garb, having family members help run their stands, or presenting photographs or brief descriptions of the farm and its livestock) offers up concrete qualities that are available to the customer. The sensuous qualities of these face-to-face encounters become evidence of an array of wider values—of, for example, a “natural” process, a “trustworthy” interaction, or an “authentic” sociocultural practice—and no doubt a host of other meanings that can be attributed to this experience within a niche-market economy of qualities.

In this book, then, I find that paying attention to such qualities and how they circulate provides a useful way to combine political economic concerns with a phenomenological perspective on lived experience. Insofar as qualities are always modes of evaluation, they are always subject to a politics. Discernment, judgment, appreciation, and the like are all forms of perceiving in the thing itself a set of sedimented values that include certain preferred qualities as legible and relevant, while discounting or excluding other claims as irrelevant or wrong. “Knowing,” for example, that “fatty pork” is “really” a good thing is a sensuous claim that can be made by looking at, handling, cooking, and eating a pork chop (as well as by raising the pig from which the chop is taken in the intended way); it plainly entails overcoming or rejecting other—often quite powerful (for example, medical, actuarial, and nutritional)—claims to the contrary. For this “knowledge” to hold, it has to appeal to some kind of authority (for example, connoisseurship, depth of experience, or sophistication) that ranks different kinds of knowledge (educated as opposed to rustic or cosmopolitan as opposed to plebian), and so quality demonstrates a

political dimension. Moreover, attention to the network of perspectives through which the process of requalification proceeds makes it clear that certain perspectives carry more weight than others. One way to see this is to see how certain attributes are readily incorporated into the network, while others fit only uncomfortably. The well-being of the pigs that are protected by animal welfare certification, for example, is a quality that carries weight at markets and among chefs, aggregators, and consumers, but there are very few, if any, similar qualifications that can certify and materialize the health care protection of the laborers who feed and water the pigs or process the pork cuts that are part of this same network. Furthermore, once we place this network in the dynamic demographic context of the contemporary North Carolina Piedmont, we can see how such perspectives are transformed over time, as certain actors in a network come to the fore while others are bypassed or marginalized. This focus can also allow us to see how certain innovations such as “local foods,” “artisanal products,” or “sustainable practices” (Paxson 2012) come to be sought out as evidence of particular qualities. In short, tracking requalifications in an economy of qualities gives us some insight into pressing political economic matters.

Finally, I should note that there is a reflexive dimension to this concern with this network of perspectives that forms a chain of qualifications. Certainly my own perspective as an anthropologist and ethnographer—as well as an occasional activist, advocate, cook, and consumer—can be taken into consideration. But, more importantly, the qualities of a network themselves are integral to the perspectives that constitute and qualify the network itself. What I mean by this is that actors in the world of pasture-raised pork routinely refer to making “connections” through their work and lives as a meaningful activity that motivates them to participate in these networks. This is not so much a premise of any network, *per se*, but is itself a privileged quality that actors attempt to realize through their practice. Connection, then, is a dimension of a network, but it is also a feature of multiple perspectives and a quality that (most people in the network hope) can be perceived in the practices and products that bind the network together.<sup>9</sup>

### Knowing Pork

The network of perspectives I have just described also served as a methodological guide for this project. This research was formulated in a farmers’

market, but that single site quickly proved to have put me firmly in an entangled, multisited “place.” There were three primary “sites” in which I carried out this work—farming, marketing, and cooking—but each of them is widely dispersed across a range of locations. They also entailed a few auxiliary sites that I will address here. Moreover, the locations I describe here are almost entirely contained in the Piedmont and even more specifically in the regions known as the Triad and the Triangle (see chapter 1 for more detail on these locales).

The first field I worked in, sequentially, was quite literally the field—that is, the paddocks in which these pastured pigs are raised. I began by working with some regularity, a few days a week at first and later for most of one summer, at Cane Creek Farm, owned and operated by Eliza MacLean. I learned the daily routines of chores, how to feed and water pigs as well as the range of other livestock found on the farm,<sup>10</sup> and the temporal organization of a pig’s life on pasture. Breeding and feeding are the central activities of the farmer-pig interface, as pigs are moved across the landscape, from one pasture to the next, and fed increasing or decreasing rations of grain to supplement their wooded and pastured resources (pigs enjoy woody mast, grubs, and a variety of plant roots) in an effort to facilitate the reproduction of livestock (when it helps to reduce their weight a bit) and to “grow them out” for market (when you want them to gain weight quickly). This work in the field also included a consideration of the energy, soil fertility, and mechanical (for example, fences, vehicles, equipment) inputs that are needed to maintain a sustainable agricultural operation; an appreciation of the way in which labor is recruited and trained in farm activities; an understanding of complex infrastructure (including housing, bedding, wallows, and water resources) required for raising livestock that rotate across pastures; and a consideration of a host of economic questions relevant to investment, growth, and diversification of farms as businesses. Most of my insights into agricultural practice are derived from my extensive fieldwork at Cane Creek, but I have worked in some capacity on over a dozen farms across the Piedmont since 2009.

My work at Cane Creek and with MacLean is the central node in my work, and it led to the other activities that constitute the niche-market network I traced out from the farm. I have talked to a number of farmers, activists, chefs, and others about processing, but I have had the opportunity to visit only a few processors. My perspective on meat processors is based primarily on my grasp of how farmers talk about and negotiate their relationship to processing and the problems many of them continue

to have with it. However, I have spent almost every Saturday morning since January 2009 working at the Carrboro Farmers' Market selling Cane Creek pork. Direct marketing, as I discuss further in chapter 1, is crucial to the rise of pastured pork in North Carolina. It is one of the primary reasons that this niche has continued to develop, and it makes North Carolina one of the most successful states for niche-market meat sales in the country.<sup>11</sup> I have also visited and talked with pork vendors at fifteen farmers' markets in the Piedmont and have had discussions with countless more farmers and customers about their experiences working and shopping at these venues. Farmers' markets are incredibly rich and complex locations where the network is densely concentrated. Chefs and consumers come together, and farmers' activities are calibrated to the requirements of filling orders for restaurants, reserving products for chefs (hoping they will show up at their appointed hour so that the farmers can avoid costly delivery expenses), and working with customers to satisfy their desire for pastured pork while also trying to cultivate their interests in new products so that more unusual cuts of pork can be sold—and in the hope that customers will more regularly return to the vendor for more purchases. Farmers also calibrate their prices, share an enormous amount of information about farming activities—including discussing the cost of feed, techniques for adapting to unexpected weather, the ups and downs of restaurant orders, the challenges of animal processing, and the changing financial and regulatory environments for farming—and swap stories and socialize with friends. It is at the market that it becomes most apparent that this economy of qualities is, indeed, a network of perspectives, as diverse actors—consumers, chefs, vendors, and farmers—reflexively present themselves and incorporate others' expectations into their own activities. It is also one of the principal locations for observing the way that the competing values of this niche as a capitalist enterprise generates friction (Tsing 2005) with the values of artisanship and collectivism in the face-to-face sociality of market interactions.<sup>12</sup>

The third field in this network that I participated in extensively is cooking. In addition to cooking up more pork than I could ever have imagined and talking to innumerable market customers about pork cookery, I had the opportunity to work in the kitchens of restaurants in the Piedmont. Most important, I worked in the kitchen of Lantern, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Andrea Reusing, the restaurant's chef-owner (and the 2011 winner of the James Beard Award for Best Chef: Southeast), who permitted me to work with her wonderful staff doing prep work be-

fore service for most of the summer in 2009. Working at Lantern gave me a further opportunity to understand the perspectives at work in this niche market, as restaurants calibrate their activities in consideration of the imagined tastes of their clients and the anticipated qualities of the products they receive from the farmers that provision them. At the same time, restaurants are critical sites for grasping the way in which such perspectives can change, as chefs, cooks, and other staff aim to educate customers about innovative menu items and food trends<sup>13</sup> and to offer feedback to farmers about the quality of the meat (and other foods) that they are looking for. The insights I gained at Lantern were indispensable to the work that I was able to do with other chefs and restaurants and with a range of “prepared food” and “value-added” sellers at markets and retail outlets in the Piedmont.

Each of these “sites” incorporates a consideration of the other two, and my understanding of each is shaped by my participation in this network as a whole. How people in this region participate in such a network is not just a methodological question, it is one of the core topics I explore in this work. Questions of race are deeply woven into the social history of the American South, North Carolina, and in rural and agricultural communities, and certainly in the making of place as I describe it. Yet I will suggest that problems of racial conflict are both a strongly felt presence as well as a glaring absence in the discourses and practices of this complex local food totality. On the one hand, there are many actors, as I describe below, who see the project of remaking food production and provisioning as a mode of social justice, one that seeks to rectify centuries of overt racial discrimination in agriculture, landholding, employment, and food resources across North Carolina.<sup>14</sup> These intentions are often explicit in the missions and practices of many activists. On the other hand, the limited presence of African American consumers at farmers’ markets across the Piedmont, from Raleigh to Durham to Greensboro (cities whose populations are approximately 30 percent, 40 percent, and 40 percent African American, respectively) is certainly vastly disproportional to the population of these communities.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, only a handful of African American farmers sell their produce at farmers’ markets in the area, and the number of livestock farmers is smaller still. This certainly does not mean that there are very few African American farmers in the Piedmont, but their participation in the networks I am describing—especially those networks constituted by pigs and pork—is certainly not robust. At the same time, because there is such an interest in making local food into a more inclusive

world, there is a good deal of discussion about race and histories of racism in the state. Often, the industrial agricultural sector (which I discuss in some detail in chapter 1) is seen as an institution that exemplifies this racialized legacy in everything from its employment practices to its environmental impacts and the food deserts it institutionalizes through its distribution models. In this way, this sector provides a kind of alibi that may deflect attention from the racial composition of markets, restaurants, and small-scale farming activities in the region. Race, then, is both a vital concern and easily overlooked in the Piedmont. In this way, it resembles the structural racialization in much of American life.

In the course of doing my research I had only very limited opportunities to work with African American farmers. The only African American livestock producer I knew of in the Piedmont was not raising pigs during the period of my research, but I was able to talk to him a bit about the history of his family's farming practices. I also worked with a few farmers who were not located in the Piedmont but were able to market their pork there.<sup>16</sup> In fact, a number of African American farmers who raise pigs either do so strictly for their own families' subsistence<sup>17</sup> or, more commonly (especially in the Coastal Plain), do so only on a part-time basis.<sup>18</sup> So, while I was able to work with a few African Americans who worked with livestock producers as extension agents, employees of institutions like North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (North Carolina A&T, whose history I discuss below), occasional farmhands, or people who had grown up farming, African American farmers are certainly not well represented in the sample of farmers I was able to work with. This is clearly an important omission, but I think it accurately reflects the demographic realities of pasture-raised pork production in the Piedmont, and the absence of African Americans speaks not simply to a weakness of my fieldwork but to the very racialized character of the world I am considering in this book.

Before I move on to a summary of the topics and questions addressed in the following chapters, I should add that there are some auxiliary sites, generally overlooked in popular discussions of food systems, in which I worked that added tremendously informative perspectives to the network. These sites include the work of advocates for this niche market, and these advocates—activists, educators, entrepreneurs, and farm extension specialists—are dispersed across the Piedmont. I have benefited enormously from my conversations (many of them cited in the following chapters) with advocates from the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the

Rural Advancement Foundation International, the Livestock Conservancy, staff at North Carolina A&T and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS), and the owners and employees at Firsthand Foods. These actors participated in and sponsored such diverse events as the Carolina Meat Conference, cooperative extension activities at North Carolina A&T, the Farm to Fork Picnic, and Field Days at CEFS, each of which gave me an opportunity to meet with a range of people interested in meat. Moreover, Jennifer Curtis graciously let me work alongside her and her partners at Firsthand Foods, visiting farms in Nash County, farmers' markets and retail facilities in the environs of Raleigh and Durham, sorting meat orders, and going over business planning in the Firsthand offices in Durham. All of these interactions inform my understanding of the complexity of the activities that are needed to make this niche market—which is both extensive and tenuous—work across the counties of central North Carolina. I have attempted to capture the irregular character of the interactions of knowledge production, entrepreneurship, service, and public policy in these networks by including several profiles in this book that feature individuals who have long been dedicated to working in these areas. The profiles (as I discuss in detail in my introduction to them) are wide-ranging, messy, and even at times tangential to the core ethnographic concerns of this book as a whole, but I feel that this reflects the nature of the diverse and experimental activities of these individuals.

One final point about a set of perspectives that is not thoroughly incorporated into this book: the views of the pigs. This book is not as fully informed by the animal turn (Weil 2010) in the academy as it might be. This is primarily because, as I freely admit, the pigs with whom I carried out this research led lives that were, with very few exceptions,<sup>19</sup> directed toward their transition into meat. This is, therefore, primarily a book about pork. It would be absurd, of course, to suggest that this telos defines the complex lives and characters of the pigs.<sup>20</sup> My focus in this work does them this injustice—although, of course, any analytic framework is always partial and interested. I would add, however, that the perspectives of pigs often do shape this network, and not simply insofar as they are potential pork. Farmers are routinely drawn to raising pigs because they have compassion for the lives of these beings or feel compelled to find an alternative to what they see as—or know to be<sup>21</sup>—the degrading conditions of industrial farming. They also must adjust their farming activities to accommodate the particularities of individual hogs. When a particular pig is known to have a proclivity to work its way through fencing in a

wooded area, cause destruction to a field through excessive wallowing, or be especially ornery in protection of other pigs, farmers have to accommodate the behavior and imagined intentions of the pigs they are raising. Moreover, customers and chefs are also drawn to the pig's perspective and often take a specific interest in the ways that these animals are raised and treated as they grow. These interests are not typically limited only to a concern with the quality of the pork these animals yield, although healthy meat and environmental stewardship are ways of registering this concern for pigs' lives. Chefs and customers routinely come out to farms to see and work with pigs and even talk about the relationships they may have formed on a farm, asking about "their pig" by name. I found the account of Will Cramer (profiled below), a farmer who gave up raising pigs after four years because of the affective implications of the process, quite compelling and moving, and I am grateful to him for allowing me to share it here.

One further note on these networks: I have generally used the names of the people I worked with in the course of conducting this research. Most of them have been enthusiastic in their support of my project (though none of them bears any responsibility for how it has turned out) and asked me to use their names. In a few instances, I have used pseudonyms or otherwise protected peoples' identities. This is not because there is anything especially sensitive or unflattering (I sincerely hope) that I have had to write, but simply because I was not able to get express permission from these people to use their names. In addition, I worked in a number of public settings (markets, restaurants, and conferences) where it would have been quite difficult if not impossible to get consent (for example, it would greatly disrupt sales at a farmers' market to ask customers for permission to describe their joyous appreciation of Cane Creek bacon), and I have done my best to render such public encounters anonymous.

## A Précis

The chapters in this book are organized around the locations that I have just described. Chapter 1 is an exception in some ways, however. There I offer a brief history of contemporary pig production in North Carolina. It covers the industrialization of confinement hogs and describes the processes and conditions that made it possible for pasture-raised pork operations to develop in the ways that they have in recent years. The chapter is generally intended to provide a background to the ethnographic work that follows, and it relies on a good deal of secondary literature—some of it

quite well known—for evidence. It also introduces a range of actors who figure prominently in the current world of pastured pork. Chapter 2 takes up the question of terroir as a way to explore questions of the relationship between food and place. I ask, in particular, about how places are made and how their specific qualities are discernible, registered, and evaluated. Here I am interested in the perspectives of the farmers, consumers, and others who live in the Piedmont—as well as residents of other regions who also recognize the Piedmont as a distinctive place. Chapter 3 considers issues relating to food and heritage. It explores in some detail the history and development of a particular kind of pig, the Ossabaw Island Hog, and considers the relationship between breeds (and, crucially, hybrids) as natural or cultural categories; examines heritage as a “value-added” dimension of animals and their products; and considers branding as a way of knowing animals, food, and their producers. Chapter 4 examines butchery. Butchering has become something of a performance art, a demonstrable craft that recruits cooks and customers to the niche market of pastured pork and provides a tactile means of embodying the qualities that constitute its sociocultural processes. The life of the pig, ironically, is poignantly rendered, abundantly valued, and laden with experiences of affect at the moment of its transition into edible cuts of pork. Next, chapter 5 discusses the quality of taste and, in particular, the flavor of pork fat as a way of exploring the important sensuous experience of eating. I consider alternative ways of conceiving of taste, from meat science to Proustian recollection, to draw out the historical and regional character of taste as a mode of innovation and tradition. The final ethnographic chapter foregrounds issues related to authenticity and connection as central motivations in the world of pasture-raised pigs. There I discuss both the relationships that are developed through conceiving of the network as a totality and those that are developed through grasping the pig itself as a unified, whole animal—from snout to tail, as the expression goes—as an icon of both connection and realness, values that are central to the world as whole. In the conclusion I take the concepts of authenticity and connection developed in chapter 6 and demonstrate how they are woven through a much wider array of concerns in this porcine network and beyond. These categories, I argue, carry a heavy ideological load. At times, they work to challenge corporate models of production and consumption, but they can also be used to reproduce many of the features of the social order that are burdened with a longer legacy of inequality and exclusion. In this way, I argue that the commodity form itself can be seen to exercise a hegemonic force in contemporary

American food politics. At the same time, I remain reluctant to dismiss the projects and efforts of the many people who are dedicated to reformulating this politics; indeed, in the course of this research, I frequently worked as an unabashed advocate for many of these reforms. My position, then, is less that of a critic who would denounce these efforts as old wine in new skins than that of a critically engaged actor trying to maintain a semblance of optimism, and I suggest that these reforms might offer the possibility of hope and the prospect of a more just and equitable food system.

Interspersed between the chapters are profiles, modified transcriptions from extensive conversations I had with people who have played a major role in promoting “real” pigs in the Piedmont. I offer a fuller introduction to these profiles and their purposes at the end of the introduction. Overall, this book proceeds from a discussion of place, heritage, and history through a consideration of artisanal craft and consumption to trace processes of requalification that are objectified and embodied in the lives of those who are working to imagine and construct an alternative system of meat production, distribution, and consumption in North Carolina’s Piedmont.

### Profiles

I have included nine profiles in this book. They are interspersed between the ethnographic and analytical chapters of the work and are intended to complement (and, I would suggest, complicate) the chapters in a number of respects. Each profile is meant to illustrate relevant themes of a given chapter or of the book as a whole, but from the distinctive perspective of the individual featured in the account. In this sense the profiles add a very particular kind of ethnographic evidence; they are not case studies *per se*, but they offer firsthand stories by individuals that address their understanding of, and relationship to, changes in agriculture, food systems, and—above all—pastured pork production and consumption in North Carolina. Some of the points these individuals raise are elaborated on in one or more of the chapters; some of them speak to common issues raised in other profiles; and some of them are perspectives, reports of expertise, and advocacy that—I hope—will speak to wider audiences.

There are a few salient methodological purposes for including these somewhat unconventional (at least in anthropological genres) profiles. To begin with, I wanted to demonstrate some of the diversity of actors who have contributed not just to this ethnographic project but also to the re-making of a “local” food system, and—more specifically—the creation of a

niche market in pasture-raised pork. This project has made use of a specific type of multisited ethnographic practice. While almost all of the work has been carried out in the Piedmont of North Carolina, within that region I have worked across different domains of practice: farmers' markets, pig paddocks, restaurant kitchens, butcher shops, and classrooms. The book as a whole, then, is not focused exclusively on pork production, marketing, or consumption but tries to tie together these diverse processes (each of which is itself a complex and historically dynamic field of activities) by following both the pig and the people who move pigs and pork across the region. I have worked, therefore, not only with the chefs and farmers who are usually included in studies like this one, but also with advocates and entrepreneurs from the world of academia and public policy who play immensely important roles in these overarching processes. Including their perspectives in these profiles allows me to cover more ground than the scope of a book like this one might otherwise permit.

The profiles are the products of conversations that I had with the individuals featured. In every case, I have known and worked (in most cases, very closely) with these people over a number of years. The conversations therefore build on a wide appreciation of the kinds of activities these people have been engaged in and reflect a good deal of background knowledge that we share. I have tried to clarify this background in the endnotes or in chapters of the book where certain issues, practices, and institutions are discussed in more depth than is the case in the profiles. The conversations presented here have certainly been edited, but I have tried to capture the voices of the people being profiled, so I left them in a somewhat raw state for a number of reasons. I am not simply trying to add local color. Rather, I am hoping to demonstrate that the way people talk about their experiences and activities is as interesting and revealing about wider social and cultural processes as what they have to say about these things. In trying to capture a Hymesian "way of speaking" (Hymes 1974) that takes communicative practice as sociocultural evidence, I consider vernacular styles as evidence of a shared world. It is important to note the way that common expressions, turns of phrase, or lexical items recur in these profiles, and especially the way these forms are used by different people engaged in very different kinds of projects. Using these transcribed conversations "as is" allows those shared resonances to emerge in a way that could be obscured if the conversations were "cleaned up," or if I had asked each of these people to write about themselves and their work. While the texts appear to be somewhat disjointed or loosely structured,

I trust that they are nonetheless coherent and compelling accounts offered by people working in the field. Furthermore, there is a wider purpose to the conversational character of these profiles, insofar as they suggest the open-ended quality of discourse. These are ideas about potential, ways of imagining possible futures of a food system that is understood to be very much in the making. This quality is well conveyed, I feel, in the style of the conversations themselves. Moreover, the “messiness” of these profiles encourages the reader to make his or her own sense of these ideas and will—I sincerely hope—invite readers to draw their own conclusions and raise their own questions. In all of these ways, the profiles are meant to draw explicit and implicit connections between the form and content of these conversations in a productive fashion.