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As Good As Niu:
Food Sovereignty in Samoa
by
Emily Gove

Honors Thesis
Submitted to
Department of Anthropology
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Advisor: Dr. Jan French

Abstract (158 words)

Samoa's history as an island nation, with its cultural heritage of migratory peoples, followed by settler colonialism and missionaries, has resulted in its uniquely amalgamated food system. Cuisine varies from traditional crops and recipes to imported canned goods, although dependence on the latter has led to wide-ranging health problems. A way to confront these problems is through reclaiming local cuisine, renewing its popularity and promoting the concept of **food sovereignty**. Through fieldwork based on surveys, interviews, and participant observation in Apia, complemented with a study of activist Robert Oliver's new cookbooks on Pacific cuisine, this project examines current themes in Samoan food culture, and attempts to improve health and cultural heritage through food. Major themes include a localized definition of organic, addressing import dependence, and connecting tenets of farm to table back to traditional methods. International food movements and growing trends of local food and food sovereignty will have a major influence on the future of Samoan cuisine.

To my parents, who always keep a farm close to their table.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my research both “in the field” and out of it, I owe thanks and gratitude to the people who gave me both support and a consistent flow of help and ideas. In Samoa, there are at least fifty of these people in the restaurants I visited, who at times went beyond any hospitality required of them, giving me plates of food, the names of contacts who would be helpful, and even inviting me on trips. Few people in Samoa would be willing to do that for a notebook-wielding *palagi* like myself, and I am grateful for their openness and willingness to share their stories.

I also give thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Samoan Beverage Company. Both were quick to respond to my questions, and enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives with me. Despite their official duties, they did not hesitate to take a few hours to sit and talk story.

To Women in Business I give a *fa’afetai tele lava*. Without the patience and helpfulness of volunteers and staff there, I could not have learned and experienced as much as I did. People like Vargas Rasch, Madda Magbity, and Toa Tauiliili let me jump right into the activities of WIBDI, guiding me through its work and bringing me with them to farms around Upolu. They also did not hesitate to give me their perspectives on what I was researching and on my *how* I was researching, and these conversations were invaluable to crafting my original project and my thesis.

Another thanks to the WIBDI leadership team, and to Robert Oliver, who found time to meet with me and share ideas during his visit to Samoa. While his books are an important demonstration of Oceanic identity, it was his actions and continued dedication to the organization and food in Samoa that spoke to his character. He is making waves!

Finally, I owe individual thanks to Jackie Fa’asisila and Ronna Hadfield in Alafua, and to Jan French in Richmond. These three women dedicated an incredible amount of time and energy to brainstorming, tracking down sources, and giving feedback on what I was writing. Whether they were talking me through survey questions on a Sunday at the beach, or staying after hours to discuss the constructs hiding behind tourism during a week of university midterms, these women were unceasingly generous with their time and ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up on a family farm in New England, and from a young age, food had an important place in my life. My family's life impressed upon me the many values of eating local, and the intricate web that grows around each crop, its sources, and its destinations. While I was initially convinced that I would get away from farm life, I found myself gravitating toward food studies in college, as my background increased my enthusiasm for topics like food justice and gastronomy.

By my junior year, I decided to spend the year abroad in three different locations, examining the food systems of each. After a summer internship in India, I spent the fall in Italy, then the following spring brought me to Samoa. Each country offered a unique context, and tradition and globalization mingled in a range of ways. In India, for instance, I volunteered at activist Vandana Shiva's nonprofit, Navdanya, which has worked to unite farmers and villagers against agribusinesses like Monsanto. The experience there was very much focused on grassroots activism and the preservation of tradition as a form of resistance to postcolonial power. Italy, home of many strong food movements and a food culture that is internationally renowned, offered me an in-depth look into the culture behind specialty foods, one might say the end to which Indian activists are striving. Tradition defines food, and food becomes central to economic and social life in the hilltop towns and farmland of my region, Umbria.

And then there was Samoa. The island nation is not known for its food culture—in fact, it is notorious for having plus-sized citizens and alarming diabetes and obesity rates. In full honesty, despite my initial scientific approach to my itinerary for my year abroad, Samoa chose me; no matter how much I diagrammed or weighed the pros and cons of each destination, I kept returning to the idea of going to Samoa, and so, eventually, I went. And while I went not knowing much at all about its gastronomy, I tried to go with an open mind and an empty stomach.

My program, through the School for International Training (SIT) and based at an agricultural campus, built up to a final month-long research period, and throughout the semester I researched and built contacts, until the final stage of fieldwork and interviews. I centered my project on Samoan cuisine, and visited as many restaurants as I could, talking with chefs in order to understand a cuisine and the needs of a clientele, and I discovered a food culture that is often obscured by caricatures created by the outside world, one with a rich history, and a growing acclaim nationally and internationally. I met traditionalists, health specialists, and experimenters, some people with acute business sense, others looking to fill a niche in the community and a sense of purpose for themselves. I loosely structured the project as a look at farm to table, although some people focused almost exclusively on the farmer, while others centralized on the table. Here, along with some cross-cultural comparisons, literary reviews, and personal reflections on the research, is the result of my immersion.

Chapter One gives the background of the country, especially concerning its food and agricultural history, which ties in heavily with colonization and then with globalization. Samoa's farming and cooking traditions have intersected with its colonial history, and continue to evolve in a globalizing context.

Chapter Two details the methodology of my research project in Samoa. I engaged in research methods such as participant observation, surveying, and interviews in order to collect data during my research period. This chapter also offers a note on identity, both my own and those of the people I worked with. As a "First World" publication on a Third World¹ culture, it is important

¹ Samoa is officially called a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). It was included on the UN's least developed country (LDC) list from 1971, but in 2014 "graduated" from the status (UN 2017)

to note that the perspective of the piece is a product of my identity as an outsider, and as a white, middle class, college-educated student, and that its claims may hold a certain degree of power as a result. It is also necessary to look critically at identities and expectations inherent in the primary and secondary sources I examined, since intersections of identity and strata of power can alter information and priorities of the speaker and listener.

Chapters Three and Four discuss the data from my research in Samoa, and then from my reviews of celebrity chef/activist Robert Oliver's books on Pacific and Samoan cuisine. The books help to confirm and further some aspects of my initial research, and offer different perspectives on other elements.

Chapter Five commences the portion of this thesis dedicated to research themes. It discusses differing perspectives on "organic produce" garnered from my research and examination of Oliver's books, also offering a redefinition of the term "organic" in the Samoan context.

Chapter Six examines the theme that was the focal point of my initial research project: the concept of farm to table in Samoa. From Oliver's featured vignettes to information offered by interviewees, to Women in Business Development's Farm to Table Program, this chapter is subdivided into four stories of various activists in the country. It provides a holistic view of the range of perspectives and action around farm to table.

Chapter Seven discusses the final theme, tourism, which has begun to incorporate the previous themes in order to market the gastronomy of Samoa to tourists. Major steps have been taken over the past decade to increase the number of non-Samoan tourists to the country, and food has played a major role in the country's appeal and marketability. I analyze tourism through the concept of hospitality, examining the interplay of host and guest at the Samoan "table."

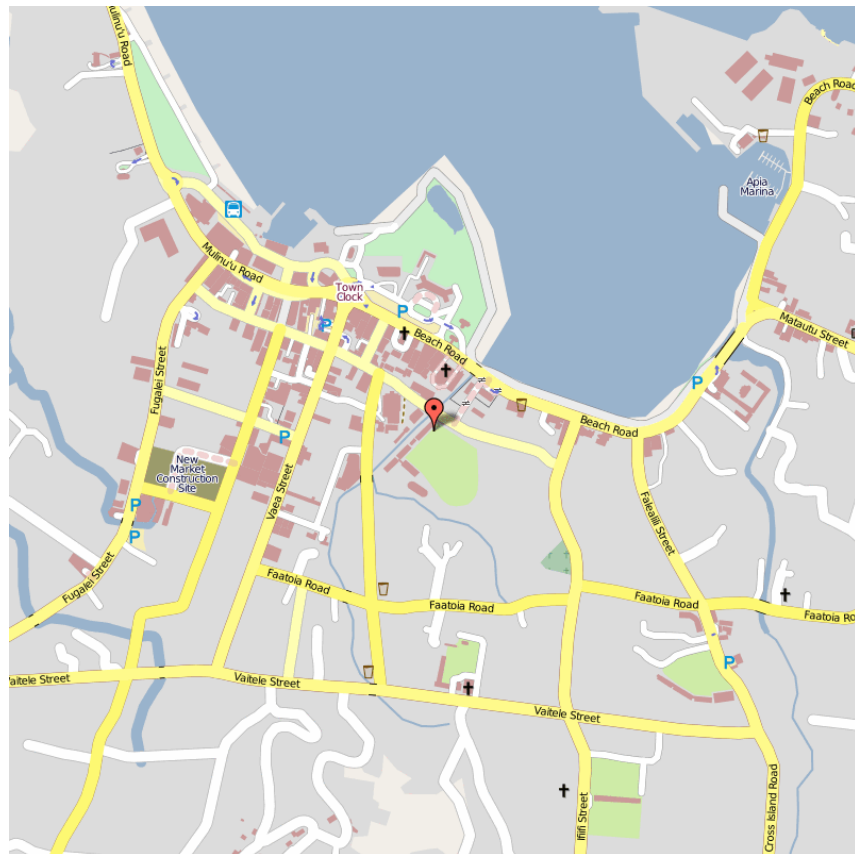
Finally, Chapter Eight concludes with a summary of themes, and a look at where the country is likely to be headed in the near future. Many current trends have been quite positive, and as local innovators see their plans come to fruition, it is important to take a critical look at the possible consequences of recent changes.

Map of Samoa



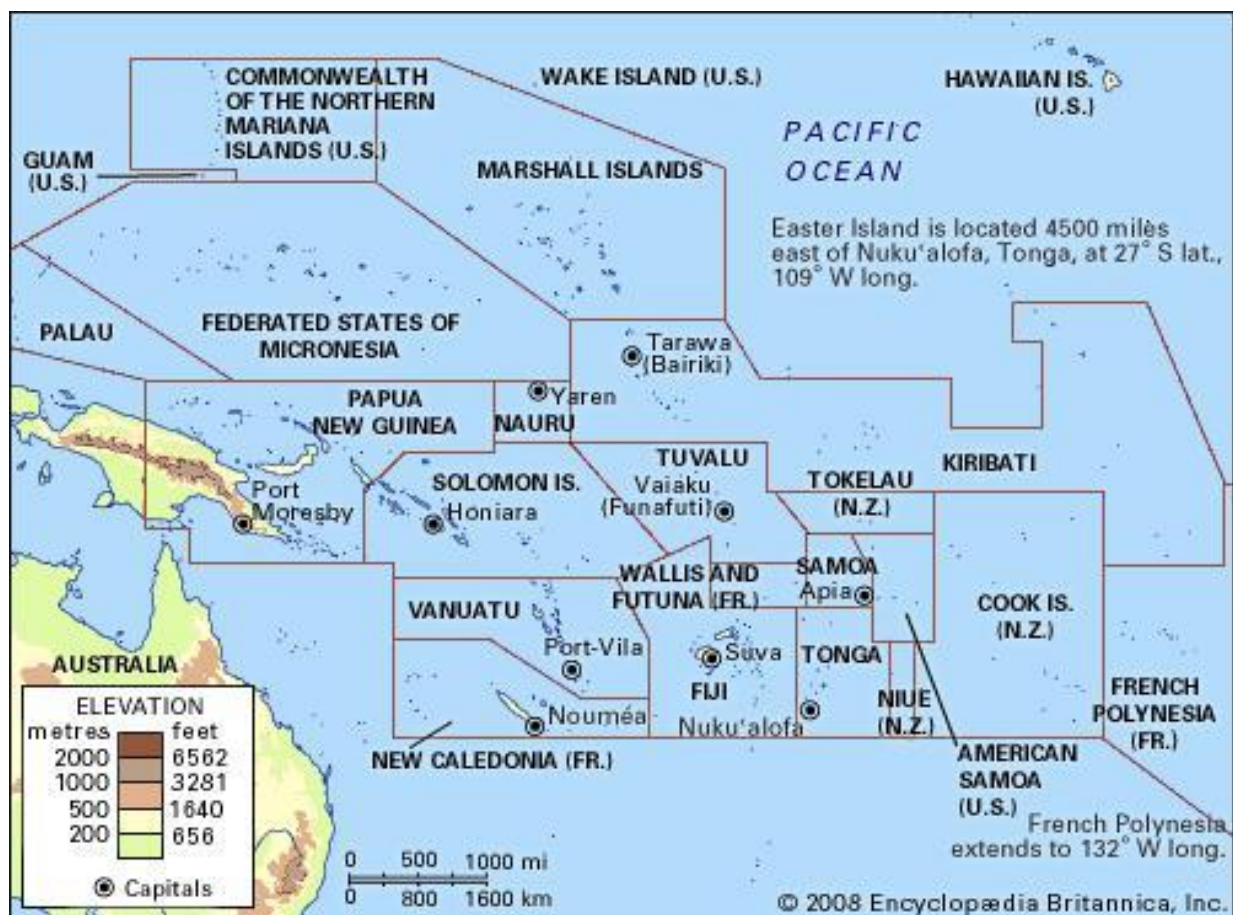
(source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@-13.7359708,-172.2084113,10.31z>)

Map of Apia



(source: <http://www.travelpod.com/small-hotel/Amanaki-Hotel-Apia.html>)

Map of Oceania



GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACIAR: Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

Culinary capital: a term developed by gastronomists to refer to *cultural capital* accrued through experiences with different foods and foodways. Culinary capital can be accrued when an actor has an experience with food that is “authentic” to another culture

Cultural capital: a sociology term relating certain items and actions to one’s social status. The term constructs an imaginary point system in which certain actions and items accrue an actor more “points” on the social scale. For example, knowledge of a certain music artist (non-mainstream, but with a good reputation) or of an authentic regional cuisine imparts that an individual has a knowledge and experience with something that others do not.

Food insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, and/or limited ability to acquire these foods without relying on food pantries or soup kitchens.[1]

FTT/FTTP: Farm to Table Program (an initiative organized by Women in Business, with funding from Oxfam and the UNDP)

LDC: Least Developed Country, a status given by the UN

MAF: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

SACEP: Samoa Agricultural Crop Enhancement Project, a government initiative funded by the World Bank

SBC: Samoan Beverage Company, producer of Taxi sodas and Taula beer (Vaitele Fou)

SIDS: Small Island Nation State(s)

Soul food: food that “feeds the soul,” usually eaten at a slower pace, with the intent of relaxation, socialization, enjoyment, and nourishment.

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

VAP: Value-added product; a food product that has been cooked, dried, or otherwise altered in order to be better preserved and/or have a longer shelf life

VFR: Visiting friends and relatives

WIBDI: Women in Business Development Incorporated

GLOSSARY OF SAMOAN TERMS

Esi: papaya

Fa'alavelave: a funeral, wedding, or other life-interrupting event

Fa'i: banana

Keke pua'a: sticky buns filled with minced pork or lamb, served steamed or fried

Keke saina: “China cake,” an onion-based cookie in a flower shape

Koko Samoa: chocolate made from Samoan cacao

Laulau: table; a food platter; to serve food

Niu: coconut

Palagi: white foreigner

Palusami: a traditional Samoan dish, made of coconut cream cooked in taro and breadfruit leaves, on an umu

Pisupo: canned goods, mainly referring to corned beef

Sapasui: Chinese chop suey

Sasalapa: soursop

Talanoa: to “talk story,” having a conversation in which story-telling is prioritized

Tamaitai: the highest-ranking woman in an extended family, usually in charge of hospitality and tradition

Taula: anchor, the name of a beer sponsored by the Samoan government and produced by Ah Liki corporation

Taupo: a young woman nominated to serve as a focal point at ceremonies for her extended family. Well-versed in traditional dance and etiquette, the *taupo* embodies culture and tradition.²

Toona'i: the Samoan Sunday meal. Most of the food for this feast is cooked on the umu

Umu: a cooking pit made of hot rocks

² Margaret Mead is perhaps the first of the line of anthropologists to describe the *taupo* as a “virgin princess” (Mead 1928). This descriptor has dangerous Western connotations, which I feel do not accurately capture the role of women in this position

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Like many Pacific island nations, Samoa has a history of settler colonialism, during which islands made contact first with “explorers,” then with missionaries and beachcombers. Colonialism set up a power dynamic between island peoples and their colonizers, as raw materials took hold as a main export with manufactured goods as sought-after imports, Samoa developed a dependence on the “first world.” Wallerstein, in detailing the dependency theory inherent in a capitalist economy, calls this phenomenon *agricultural capitalism*, in which he signifies that the periphery (“developing” nations) holds the burden of agriculture and raw material production, while the core refines those products. The dependency in this system is caused by the need for profit—processed goods rise in price at each step of their refinement, and so periphery nations spend more than they make off of their exports (Wallerstein 1979:16). Samoa, like neighboring island nations, became a source from which colonial powers could extract resources.

Strategic location was also a major component of colonialism, and Samoa became a refueling point for “exploratory” voyages, and later, trans-Pacific flights. After World War II, Oceania entered into a period referred to as postcolonialism, during which the term *globalization* became widely used to refer to developing international trade networks. Firth describes globalization as “the process in which the production and financial structures of countries are becoming interlinked by an international division of labor in which national wealth comes, increasingly, to depend on economic agents in other countries” (Firth 2000:178). Firth echoes Wallerstein in his exposure of inequitable trade patterns that lead continuously away from the producing nations. Thus, the labor in Samoa shifted from its traditionally local and communal system to a market system in which other nations and corporations either extracted more materials or sold processed commodities.

Samoa began as a communal culture, in which the islands were composed of villages of multiple extended families. Roles were usually based on gender, with each family usually nominating men to become *matai*, or chiefs, and women to become *taupo*, a role that could be equated to a ceremonial head, and one that traditionally at least, referred to an unmarried, virginal woman (Mead 1928). Other roles of power included the talking chief, who spoke for the *matai*, and the wife of the *matai*, who also had a great deal of ceremonial power. *Matai* were chosen based on their contributions to the family and the community as a whole, and all community members were expected to put the community above themselves. The family, or *‘āiga*, has been classed as a cognatic descent group, meaning that it is a kin group that is not based on unilineal descent (Stover 1999:72). In other words, family leaders are elected, but the family as a whole stays together.

In terms of agriculture, Samoa’s communal society was physically structured with each extended family holding a certain amount of land, which its members would farm according to their need. Family ties can be traced matrilineally or patrilineally, therefore individuals can belong to multiple families. However, cohabitation is usually the main indicator of family, and the *matai* oversees distribution in his/her family. Those who cultivated food could be called upon by the *matai* to supply for the rest of the family, and thanks to the communal setup of the family and community, it was understood that each member would put the communal good over personal benefit.

Initially settled by the Polynesian voyagers around 1000 BCE, the Samoan islands had, and continue to have, extensive trade networks with other islands in Oceania. John Williams and other missionaries arrived in 1830, and as more Western voyagers and missionaries traveled to the island, it came under colonial control. In 1898, German, American, and British consulates were

established in the capital city of Apia, shortly after the death of King Malietoa Laupepa (Maleisea 1987:98). A succession dispute led to the split between Western and American Samoa: the former fell under German control, the latter under US. Due to its strategic position, Western Samoa was occupied by New Zealand during the First World War, to the dismay of locals but satisfaction of Britain, which according to Samoan historians “had always regarded the Pacific as a British sphere of influence” (Meleisea 1987:126). Samoa remained a trusteeship of New Zealand until 1962, when local voices finally reached a pitch loud enough to be heard at the international level. Since its independence, the country has established a form of democratic government, and changed its name in 1997 to the Independent State of Samoa.

Since colonialization, independence, and globalization, perceptions of the Pacific region have evolved. According to island academics, the best way to refer to the region is through the name *Oceania*, which implies “a sea of islands” rather than “islands in a distant sea” (Hau’ofa 1994:153). Changing how we name the area changes our perception of the lands and peoples there: the latter description is a product of colonial times, and has endured and in turn rendered islands small and “helpless” in global perceptions. Hau’ofa’s new articulation shows not only the intricate connections among island societies, but also the important role of the sea as a source of cultural identity and physical scope. Oceania includes the waters of the Pacific Ocean as part of a dynamic system of interrelations, demonstrating the massive size of the new Oceania, as well as advocating for stewardship of the sea that connects its people. In fact, Samoan people are often called *Samoana*, which means “people of the sea.”³

Cultural perceptions of agriculture and cooking still emphasize old ways, but have experienced unique encounters with imported foods and Western foodways since colonization and postcolonial globalization and import dependence. Samoa has been under the control of Germany and New Zealand, and has recently had growing contact with China. Thanks to some small industrial endeavors by China on the islands, there are many *afakasi* (mixed race) Samoans who have some Chinese ancestry. Some Chinese foods have found new expression in Samoa, as have canned goods commonly found in New Zealand and the US. Prominent examples of fusions between tradition⁴ and imported food culture are the *umu*, *toona’i*, and *fa’alavelave*.

The *umu* is a traditional open oven: a firepit filled with coconut husks and hot stones, on which an extended family--and oftentimes an entire village--will cook meals.⁵ Many traditional staples of an *umu*-based meal remain: *pua’a* (pork), *ulu* (breadfruit), *palusami* (tastes like a spinach dip with coconut milk), and various sea creatures (Oliver 2013a:57-61). Some analysts have suggested that the *umu* remains a visceral symbol of Samoa’s communal culture: while other societies developed pots over time, the *umu* remained the most efficient way to cook in bulk, and thus sustain a community, rather than individuals (Wilson 2014:7). For traditional cooking, banana and taro leaves and baskets are still preferred over pots, which would limit the quantity of food being cooked.

Toona’i is a Sunday meal (in fact, the Samoan word for Saturday is *Aso Toona’i*, or “the day of *Toona’i*,” during which much of the meal is prepared for consumption on Sunday). *Toona’i* represents a blending of Western and traditional Samoan culture. Much of the meal is cooked on the *umu*, featuring cuisine discussed above, but in addition to this cuisine are new staples that have

³ *Samoa* on its own actually means “holy chicken,” and was derived from an oral history about the god Maui, who threw rocks at a chicken he was chasing. Those rocks became the islands of Samoa.

⁴ Here, *tradition* is meant to refer to Samoan society before Captain Cook reached the Pacific islands, opening up lines of communication with the West.

⁵ See Appendix L-N for photos of the *umu*, *toona’i*, and *fa’alavelave*

grown in popularity: imported corned beef, spam, *sapasui* (Chinese chop suey), packaged cookies, crackers, or chips, *pisupo* (corned beef and other canned goods), and Maggi noodles. Sometimes carb staples like *ulu* and *fa'i* (banana) will be replaced with conventional white bread or crackers, used in place of the traditional foods to eat as scoops for dishes like *palusami*. Fresh seafood may be present, but it too is being increasingly displaced by imported canned seafood: fusion dishes like tinned herring in coconut milk met with increasing popularity, as did frozen chicken.

Fa'alavelave is a ceremony when there is a major change to a family's way of life. Synonymous with "trouble," it covers every event from weddings to funerals, and each event is a huge expense to the family it concerns. Since Samoa is a communal culture, status comes from what an individual contributes to the community, rather than what they accumulate for themselves, at each *fa'alavelave* it is expected that the host family give more items than it receives. These range from fine mats and palm fronds (symbolic) to commonly-used commodities like canned goods. Traditionally, people exchanged fish at *fa'alavelaves*, but canned goods and non-perishables have proven more convenient. These goods are exchanged back and forth, and mainly include corned beef and tinned herring. As a system of obligation, the form of *fa'alavelave* has also changed with globalization: wages enable Samoans to buy new canned goods for the ceremonies, and since wages are much higher abroad, remittances have become a major part of the GDP, their main purposes being family support and *fa'alavelave* (Levi 2016).

In the past decade, Samoa's tourism industry has grown substantially, becoming a significant contributor to the country's GDP (estimated at 20% of it) and altering the lifestyles of permanent residents on the island. While about 75% of the local population lives in rural areas, all are affected by these changes, as they have changed economic priorities of the country, and in doing so altered export needs (FAO 2012). Food is a major area in which this change may be seen: with more outsiders, foreign products must be imported to meet demands, and the agricultural sustainability⁶ of the islands are compromised as a result (Oliver 2013:14). Most small-scale farms focus on feeding the extended family, and grow crops local to the island, a surplus of which can be sold at markets, but a small and growing number of more commercial farmers focus on products like eggplant, cucumber, and lettuce, which are demanded by the hospitality industry (FAO 2012). Conversely, there has been increased demand for the hospitality sector to incorporate local products into its cuisine, and government-supported organizations and committees have formed in order to promote linkages between local, sustainable agriculture and the hospitality sector.

Clients at restaurants range from local Samoans to US and New Zealand expats and tourists. In terms of the latter, 40% of visitors to the island are Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs), 38% are travel/leisure tourists, and the remaining 22% are related to the fishing and sports industries (FAO 2012). Tourism is not the main barrier to consistently-produced local foods, but the industry is growing. Current barriers to local production include environmental changes, which have changed water temperatures and the climate of the islands. This has damaged the fishing industry, and made it difficult to continue growing crops that wilt in warmer temperatures. Recent

⁶ "sustainability" has become an academically vague word that has lost its significance with frequent use. Here, I use it to refer to the ability of Samoa as a bounded society to provide enough food for its people. The risk of losing "sustainability" comes with Samoa's increasing dependence on imported processed goods, which has led to increased rates of obesity and diabetes, and less agriculture. Thus, if the imports stopped, Samoa would have a food crisis, with limited imports and agriculture insufficient to feed the population. "Sustainability" throughout this paper refers to the food system's capacity to support the population in the event of an import shortage, and the ability to replant crops each year without depleting soil nutrients.

initiatives for tourism have proven popular, such as island food tours and plantation stays, which have a stronger focus on Samoan cooking traditions for shorter-stay tourists (Solemuno 2016). More analysis and development in the area would prove beneficial, as the number of groups involved in food tourism is constantly growing.

As tourism and postcolonial globalization push and pull Samoa's food system, recent years show a growing dependence on imported canned goods and highly-processed products, which in turn increases the rates of diseases like diabetes and obesity in the country. These new food sources, though popular and readily-available, are not usually nutritious, nor do they stimulate the local economy in the way that crops would (Hughes 2005). A push for local items has taken shape in response: restaurants emphasize local products, celebrity chef Robert Oliver has published a book on the vibrancy of local cuisine, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Oxfam have partnered to support a Farm to Table (FTT) Program at Women in Business Development, Inc. (WIBDI), a local nonprofit. All of these efforts have begun to push Samoa's food system in a new (or perhaps, old) direction, thanks to Oliver's book receiving the Gourmand award in 2010, and growing visibility of international food sovereignty movements like La Via Campesina and Slow Food.

Established in 1991 to support urban and rural women in the workforce, WIBDI has evolved to target mainly rural women, who tend to be left out of plantation work. Through encouraging non-typical (though still native to the islands) agricultural products and handicrafts, WIBDI encourages handicraft, and connects women with buyers for their products. The organization has mostly local leadership, with sponsorship and volunteers from donor organizations, as well.⁷

As Samoa moves forward in nutrition, local empowerment, and independence from foreign sources, businesses are likely to focus more on local food sources. Tourism will also play a large role in culinary shifts at restaurants that cater largely to foreigners, demanding that restaurants cater to new tastes and also respond to demands for "tropical" products (a general stereotype that may differ from Samoan cuisine in practice). Publications and television have already begun to apply and spread the stereotype, with *Bizarre Foods'* Andrew Zimmern describing his eating experience as "one of the most exotic cookouts of my entire life" (Zimmern 2013). Local products in tourist venues will provide a boost for the economy, as Samoa lacks the scale to compete in most global markets with agricultural products (Robbins 2003:6).

⁷ Donors include the Samoan government, New Zealand Aid Development, Oxfam New Zealand, Canada Fund, AusAid, the Global Fund for Women, Tindall Foundation, UNDP, EU, South Pacific Commission, Air New Zealand, and Samoa Tel. See <http://www.womeninbusiness.ws/partners.html> for more details.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND VOICE

When conducting my research project in Samoa, I used surveys and interviews to compile my primary data, and went to WIBDI to accompany members on site visits and compile organic baskets at the end of the week. My methods were diverse, as I was aiming to cover a wide range of perspectives in order to find answers to my research questions, which center on restaurants' current efforts in sourcing food locally, and the effectiveness of these efforts. The FTTP has served as a model for localizing food in Samoa, and I focused my research on the program, its relationship with restaurant partners, and alternatives that restaurateurs had developed.

I distributed my surveys by hand throughout Apia, the capital city. I secured responses from 53 restaurants, of various size, ownership, cuisine, and price range.⁸ The surveys each had seven questions, and restaurant managers had the option to leave questions blank if they found it uncomfortable to answer. My contact information was written at the bottom, and I made sure to explain, in person, what the aims of the research project were. To acknowledge the project and their part in it, managers were asked to sign the bottom of the survey, where a statement of consent gave their permission for me to use their data in the survey analysis process. Some managers and owners were particularly enthusiastic, and sat down with me for an hour or so for informal interviews. I encountered more participant eagerness--and on that note, less suspicion--than did my peers, and I attribute this to my non-confrontational subject. The topic of food awakened in many owners and chefs their passion for good quality, and many had developed farm to table systems on their own, which they were candid about sharing with me.

The *talanoa* method was essential during the nine interviews I conducted. In English, this interview style could be called unstructured or reflexive, but the term has special connotations in Samoan. *Talanoa*, which means "to talk, chat, or make conversation," is a term which has an element of storytelling incorporated in its meaning--a more accurate translation would be to talk story, or yet more specifically, "talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework." This method, discussed by Vaioleti, is a means of working with Pacific culture, rather than "holding all cultures to the same epistemological standard" (2006:22). Rather than a strict interview of question and answer, *talanoa* allows the interviewee to speak freely and at length about their story. Vaioleti quotes a past piece to illustrate, asking "why hound me with a question when you don't care for an answer, why play for a pair when there is only one dancer..." (qtd Vaioleti 2006:21).

I had initially compiled a number of interview questions, which I had intended to use in order to structure the interviews. However, I found that "food" alone was a trigger word that sparked enthusiasm, and took each interviewee in his/her own direction. Once I had summarized my project and my hopes for my research (adding that I was eager to hear their perspective on the current state of food in Samoa) interviewees needed little further prompting, other than a few clarifying questions. Thus, my interviews became loose, semi-structured, *talanoa*-based conversations. I gave priority to what interviewees wanted to tell me, letting the interview take its own path, rather than the one I would have laid out for it. My *talanoa* approach freed interviewees from constraints, although much contextual meaning may have escaped me as a foreigner. Still, in order for the *talanoa* to work, I as interviewer and researcher needed to also give pieces of myself in order to be given stories from my interviewees: in order to reach a common context and understand one party's experience, I, the other party, needed to share my own.

⁸ For a full copy of the survey, see Appendix A

The on-the-ground study was conducted from the end of March to the end of April, 2016. My research was based mostly in the city of Apia, where the headquarters of WIBDI is located, as well as the restaurants surveyed, the Samoan Beverage Company (SBC) headquarters, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF). Data from surveys was collected and compiled quantitatively, and interviews was analyzed qualitatively. Participants in the surveys were primarily restaurant owners and managers, while interviewees ranged from members of WIBDI, to advertising managers of the SBC, to government workers, to restaurant owners and local food activists, including author and chef Robert Oliver, whose books I examine in Chapter Four.⁹

Verbal consent for interviews was given, and survey results do not publish or mention the names of any restaurants or individuals. No personally harmful information was involved in either interviews or surveys, but nonetheless, results were kept on a password-protected computer. Food is not a particularly sensitive subject, but all participants were given the option of skipping questions or backing out at any time. Ethics and respect were highly important in the project, and all perspectives were welcomed, valued, and protected to the best of my ability. Human subjects policies and ethical research guidelines were adhered to.

For the initial research, done as part of my coursework for the SIT (School for International Training) program, much of my identity and background as a New England conventional farmer led to conclusions that may not have grasped the full cultural context of my research. I was able to collect 53 surveys and nine interviews, but I have found that my interpretation of the results was culturally-bounded, and divergent from islanders' interpretations of the same information. This project seeks to address my results as data once more, but also reflect on my own interpretations, in terms of their foundations and potential implications of such perspectives occupying the dominant global narrative.

As I read *Mea 'ai Samoa*, I get a sense of many identities: the chefs, Oliver as author, and myself as reader. The book is an attempt to unify the three groups, and to preserve a culture by bringing the outsiders into the Samoan kitchen. Oliver himself is not Samoan; he and his family lived in the country for some time, and he shares his feeling that because of the culture's welcoming nature, "Samoa gets its hooks in you and you become a little bit Samoan" (Oliver 2013a:13). While Oliver feels accepted in the culture (and many interviews confirmed the mutual feelings of Samoans who knew him), he is an outsider, a *palagi* (foreign white person) who in a way has become part of the country's settler colonialist history, and been able to carve a place for himself simply by being white and privileged. Nonetheless, many foreigners had positive reputations among locals, and had become locals, themselves. When on farm visits, I asked my contacts what they it took for a *palagi* to become Samoan. "They must live here for many years, and also it's essential that they understand the people. Really, they should also speak the language," (Rasch 2016). Thus, Robert Louis Stevenson was Samoan, but Margaret Mead was not. In this vein, the analogy is paralleled in a comparison of Oliver with food tourist Andrew Zimmern: Oliver is Samoan, Zimmern is not. Oliver lived in Samoa, befriended locals, and now works to give back to those who welcomed him, Zimmern arrived for a week looking for the bizarre and exotic, and "finding" it--whether he invented it or not.

As the reader, I am still more of an outsider, accessing the culture through Oliver's eyes, with my own cultural lenses. I stayed in Samoa for a short time, and under the expectation that I would complete the required research by the end of my three month stay. In effect, I was set up to be Margaret Mead, not Robert Oliver. And with this, it is ironic that I am now the one with the

⁹ Book covers can be found in Appendix B

final word, the one writing the research. I have read the book about Samoan culture, but I have not written it.

Something different might be said about my identity as a surveyor. After distributing surveys for a month-long period, I discovered that there were some issues both behind extracting information from locals, and from the “purpose” of the survey. I had little success in the endeavor, at first: when I told restaurants I was a student from the US looking to ask them questions, many immediately accused me of being, in short, the second coming of Margaret Mead. I began to restructure my identity as I attempted to navigate my relationship with locals. “I’m researching on behalf of the University of the South Pacific,” I would tell them instead. USP, one of two universities in Samoa, has a respected agricultural school, and my research on food corresponded better with the school (where the project was filed and published) than with a study abroad program. I tried to make them feel as though their input was valued and valuable for the future—as indeed it was, although things often move slowly in the country and it could be years before change occurs.

The second part of my survey “spiel” that I changed was the purpose. Initially, I asked what the owners thought of farm to table, and if they had worked with WIBDI. However, I noticed that many owners became reserved when they heard me mention the program, and gave positive, though strained, responses about the benefits of local food. To see if anything would change, I began to ask owners when I delivered the surveys if they ever had trouble with FTTP, saying that hearing their opinions (*all* of their opinions) could help to improve food business in the future. By acknowledging that a system that many laud as perfect does in fact have shortcomings, I found many business owners ready and willing to talk with me about my research. While before I was shuffled in and out of the restaurants, changing how I explained my research—showing that the data I acquire should be helping them, rather than me—I found a great deal of warmth and enthusiasm. This turned some of my data from surveys to interviews and visits, and some themes emerged not from the surveys alone but also from the messages from the chefs, themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA- SURVEY FINDINGS

A total of 53 surveys were returned, from restaurants in and around the city of Apia. Nearly three-fourths of the restaurants started between 2010 and 2016. This may show quick changeover between owners, or short lifespans of the majority of restaurants. Restaurant owners were asked why they started their restaurants in the same question. Then, they were asked to describe the type of food served at the restaurant, the demographics that frequented it, and where they sourced their ingredients from. The final question asked how the use of local products impacted the business, another free-response question that sought to collect a diverse array of opinions, rather than prompting a single response.¹⁰

The second part of question #1 asked why the business was started. Many did not answer this part of the free-response question, however, among those that did, trends emerged among responses: the top reason for starting the restaurant was that the type of food satisfied a need in the community, or fit into a niche that a certain demographic was looking for.¹¹ This response had nearly double the respondents of each of the next four reasons, to support the family, to pursue a dream/passion, to start a business, and to make money/profit. Other responses were only brought up by one to three respondents, ranging from having a calling from God to feeling a desire to serve the community.

Restaurants were asked to describe their clientele, and given the options of four boxes: expat/local *palagi* (white foreigner), tourist, Samoan, and Samoan visiting from abroad. They were encouraged to “check those that apply,” in order to accurately portray their clientele.¹² However, overall tallies left little difference between demographics, only varying in number by a few percentage points (a difference of five check marks). Local *palagi* and Samoan got the highest number of check marks, suggesting that the local market is stronger than the tourist market, although with such small variation, it is impossible to generalize.

Nearly 80% of restaurants got their food from a combination of local and imported sources, while nearly 20% had only local sources.¹³ With a fifth of the restaurants surveyed already breaking away from import dependence, the future for the local food system looks optimistic, and interviews supported these findings. When asked whether they grew any of their food supply, 40% of restaurants answered “yes,” and 60% answered “no.”¹⁴ This, too, was higher than anticipated.

Top foods bought at the local market included vegetables, *niu* (coconut), cucumber, and fruit, all of which were mentioned seven or more times. Responses were analyzed by tallying the frequency of each word that was mentioned.¹⁵ Taro, *fā'i* (banana), tomato, pumpkin, and eggplant were mentioned a total of five times. When products were grouped into categories (vegetable, fruit, etc), analysis revealed that nearly two thirds of foods mentioned were vegetable products. Interviews confirmed that restaurants prioritize buying vegetables locally. The same was true for foods purchased directly from the farmer/producer: nearly half of the foods mentioned were vegetables.¹⁶ The items mentioned the most were tomato, lettuce, *fā'i*, and taro.

¹⁰ See Appendix A

¹¹ See results in Appendix C

¹² See Appendix D

¹³ See Appendix E

¹⁴ See Appendix F

¹⁵ See Appendix G. The words “vegetable” and “fruit,” were also counted as items, since some restaurants only wrote those words as their answer. Others used them to emphasize the amount of vegetables/fruits purchased, putting them at the beginning of a list.

¹⁶ See Appendix H

The items mentioned most from wholesale sources were chicken, meat, and milk, followed by rice, sausage, and eggs.¹⁷ When results were grouped, meat, poultry/eggs, seafood, and dairy held the biggest share of items purchased. In other words, animal products were purchased most at this level, with vegetables and fruits accounting for under 20% of purchases.

Not many restaurants had food items listed for the garden portion of Question 6. Those that did listed mainly vegetables and herbs/spices.¹⁸ Specifically, tomatoes and parsley were the produce most frequently grown. The majority of garden produce as herbs and vegetables was supported in interviews and participant observation at WIBDI, where organic baskets were composed mostly of vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Staff explained that herbs were often not available at the market because of wilting/spoiling, so restaurants or chefs will grow the produce, themselves (Magbity 2016).

When asked how the use of local products impacted business, respondents gave a range of answers. Price (“local food is cheaper”) was the most cited response, given by nearly half of the restaurants. Twenty-three (23) restaurants referenced price, and ten referenced freshness, explaining that local produce was usually fresher. The next most popular response involved availability.¹⁹ Ironically, the number of respondents who wrote that local produce was the most available was equal to that of those who said that local food was inconsistent in its supply. The range of opinions reflects the range of responses for previous questions, as well as why there is still a stable import market for certain products. Those who referenced inconsistency usually mentioned the same products (lettuce, tomatoes), which can be difficult to grow in Samoa’s hot climate. Rainy seasons also influence the growth of crops, and producers and consumers must be responsive to seasonality. Interviewees suggested that the reasons for inconsistency were tied to cultural views of time, money, and profit: once farmers collected money for a harvested crop, they would not plant again until the money ran out. The results of questions 6 and 7 on the survey will be discussed further in the themes portion, as they offered perspectives along similar lines to the interviews and cookbooks.

¹⁷ See Appendix I

¹⁸ See Appendix J

¹⁹ See Appendix K

CHAPTER FOUR: *ME'A KAI* AND *MEA 'AI SAMOA*

Mea'ai Samoa is Oliver's followup to *Me'a Kai*, offering more localized recipes "from the heart of Polynesia. In light of my research project conducting surveys and interviews at restaurants in Apia, the book is an ideal complement to my research thus far, addressing similar topics and contacting some of the same people, but providing a compact source in which to view key players in the Samoan restaurant world, and an inside look at local perspectives on organic local food. Oliver was a major founding member of Women in Business Development Inc (WIBDI), and his ideals of the business and his plans for it are present in the book, to an extent that I would not have been able to see on the ground during my participant observation.

Like its predecessor, the book features vivid photography and equally colorful local characters. Starting from the cover there is a strange interplay of Samoa as it conforms to international stereotypes, and an "authentic" look at the culture. The cover and dedication feature young Samoan women holding baskets of produce, which at first impression might further the exoticism that the island nation has faced since before the time of Margaret Mead. However, when thinking about the book as a political statement, these women mean something more. Oliver worked closely with WIBDI, an organization dedicated to promoting businesses owned and run by women, and in shining a spotlight on women in agriculture, who have hitherto either remained in the shadows or been prevented from working in plantations with men. In short, women's efforts in agriculture and furthering Samoan cuisine have been significant, and this book celebrates them.

While this is classified as a cookbook, the recipes do not start until page 92. The first third of the book is dedicated to Samoan people, food culture, farming practices, healing, and umu. Rather than a cookbook, *Mea'ai Samoa* is a cultural guide through symbols of food. Each recipe looks into the life of a different Samoan, either through their restaurant, hotel, private home, or farm. The book tells the story of Samoans and their history, capturing a cultural identity through its verbal and pictorial imagery.

Faces are as important as food, and Oliver's message is political. From the start, he shows his opposition to imports and "food colonialism," with which foods "rejected as too fatty by consumers in their countries of origin were offloaded here" (Oliver 2013a:14). Now that Samoans have developed a taste for imports, Oliver stresses the necessity of weaning the nation off of such foods, even though families may prepare them lovingly. He then describes the influx of fast and processed foods, which arrived after the fatty imports, and served to further change the lives, diets, and health of Samoans. His message is powerful and clear:

"In a tourism-led economy, when tourism menus do not reflect local food culture, there is a run-on effect. Menus based on local cuisines require local agriculture, whereas 'imported' menus require imports, resulting in a constant dripping loss to the national economy" (Oliver 2013a:17).

The book depicts old foodways in a new context, offering resistance to many effects of globalization, but also the possibility of new paths and adaptations. It provides educational sections for different crops and Samoan vocabulary, and vivid imagery for chefs and their dishes. The theme of food that nourishes the community and the environment is present throughout the book, as is the motif of relationship--with the environment and each other. As he introduces chefs and dishes, Oliver is present in the book, and he describes things not as an omniscient presence, but rather as an additional part of a web. For example, Oliver introduces WIBDI director Fuimaono Roalio Me's dishes lauding her hard work and contributions to the organization, adding that

because of her warmth and kindness “everyone calls her Auntie Fui” (Oliver 2013a:98). The familiarity of this “auntie” suggests not only a relationality to Oliver, but also a desired connection with the reader and to the Samoan community as a whole.

In other recipes, when Oliver may not know the chefs as well, he adds his thanks at the end of the introduction, either citing a chef, a chief, or an entire village. While this is less personal than sections in which an individual chef presents their work, it continues to lend to the sense of community Oliver seeks to further with the dishes. It is unclear whether the featured chefs have personally benefitted from the book, but through his acknowledgements and the WIBDI feature on him, it looks as though the books were made with the intent to pay it forward. WIBDI credits Oliver with crafting its farm to table program, which “leverages the successful *Mea'ai Samoa* cookbook” (WIBDI). The organization features and sells copies of the books, in turn promoting the FTTP, which works to put the relationships discussed in the books to practice. The goal of the books and the FTTP in recording and sharing recipes is not only to legitimize cultural traditions and foodways, but also to provide concrete written recipes that chefs can rely on in future initiatives, adding stability to the current food system (Oliver 2010:476). Perhaps he goes so far as to attempt to solidify culture.

Oliver offers a closing note to his book which reflects his TED talk, “Recipes for Development” (2013b). He creates a graphic to explain his hopes, placing locally-sourced and -inspired menus in the center, and branching into all of the positive effects that this may have. *Tatau* (native tattoo) patterns line the borders of these pages, and the woman from the cover sits on a palm tree holding a basket of fruit. Oliver shows once more the political nature of his book, and the many facets that such intentions as his can have, ranging from community and hospitality to environment (Oliver 2013a:262).

CHAPTER FIVE: ORGANIC

“By becoming organic, we are staying Samoan”

-Adimaimalaga Tafuna'i

In *Me'a Kai*, by Robert Oliver

While discussing the food system trends in Samoa, and in Oceania as a body, it is important to address the definitions that accompany a foreign lens. In this study, one of the most salient disparities concerns the term “organic.” The concept of organic initially took shape in the United States as a response to industrial farming, catalyzed by “those who perceive that current farming practices are not good for them as individuals, the country or the planet” (Hepworth 2001:64). Organic food, when set in contrast with conventionally-grown food, becomes a saving grace for a wary eater. Faced with a grocery store shelf lined with products subject to genetic modification, radiation, neurotoxins, steroids, and hormones, “organic” leaps out as, if not completely good, the least bad alternative for wary buyers (Masson 2009:178).

Never mind that, in the US, the term is now the property of the US government, and that the former agribusiness CEOs who sit on the director’s board of the USDA have crafted a definition to suit corporate interests. In other words, the definition concerns what chemicals and additives can go into growing the foods, and for big agriculture to function, a number of chemicals (nonsynthetic, such as hydrogen peroxide and arsenic) must continue to be used (US Government Publishing Office 2009). For produce, the USDA sums up its extensive lists of regulations by defining organic produce as “certified to have grown on soil that had no prohibited substances applied for three years prior to harvest (McEvoy 2012).

From frustration with the USDA and government organic regulation (or lack thereof) have arisen books, documentaries, social protests, and alternative, independent labeling systems. However, its definition can be paraphrased to be “something not added.” While this is the USDA’s definition mainly, it is important to consider the connotations of this: what it discusses, and what it leaves out. What is not outwardly said in the list of federal regulations is the sheer cost of organic certification in the US, and, for a great deal of meat, dairy, and produce, the overwhelming cost of new equipment and soil turnover. Critics believe that this new system privileges large farmers and crushes small ones, since only large farms will have the flexibility to afford certification.

Robert Oliver, celebrity chef and food activist, has worked with local businesses and nonprofits in Samoa to localize the definition of organic, and thus to share with the outside world this redefining of the term. With Oliver’s background growing up in a communalist Oceanic culture, he notes that food is for everyone, and that organic does not mark a counteraction to aggressive agribusiness, but rather demonstrates a reflection of traditional values and practices. Thus, “organics in the Pacific is not just a health brand, it’s a validation of traditional Polynesian and Melanesian farming methods” (Oliver 2013b). As food sovereignty movements take shape and gather strength, Oliver’s redefinition finds echoes in other cultures, where grassroots movements advocate for a return to traditional farming and food systems.

Oliver works closely with Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI) in Apia, and helped to create its Farm to Table (FTT) initiative. The WIBDI website features an organics section that reflects Oliver’s perspective, describing the nation as “the ideal organic safe haven” (WIBDI, Organics in Samoa). This metaphor is especially potent because, while it validates the traditional agriculture of Samoa, it counters efforts in academia to portray Oceania not as isolated points, but rather as an interconnected Oceanic system (Hau’ofa 1994:153). However, in the arena of organic

agriculture, Samoa's small size and isolation are some of its greatest assets, as are the island stereotypes that academics also work to avoid: "abundant sunshine, tropical climate, and generous rainfall." The site goes yet one step beyond this to assure readers that Samoan produce is raised "free from the contaminants of other nations" (WIBDI, Organics in Samoa).

Samoa's small size works in its favor for specialty foods, and WIBDI has started to effectively market products like coconut oil, planning to start juice and dried banana initiatives with its new factory building. There is already international trade in coffee, cocoa, and coconut oil to The Body Shop and New Zealand specialty stores (Me 2016). According to WIBDI, Samoa will find its international niche through organic specialty foods, and will also maintain its popularity among Samoans abroad.

WIBDI reports having helped found and implement the Pacific Regional Organics Task Force, a group that has since developed the Pacific Organic Standard for assessing island agriculture. At a 2010 meeting, the organization stressed the importance of shifting the benefits of its policy to those living in rural areas, who make up a large portion of Oceania. It considers the most vulnerable demographics to be farmers, fishermen, and women, and seeks to improve food security of these groups through land management and development. Specifically, assistance comes in the form of technical support, training, and consulting in key agricultural areas (SPC Land Resources Division 2010). WIBDI thus has had success in its initiatives at a local and regional level, and demonstrates that the importance of organic cuisine reaches far beyond an alternative to conventional farming in Oceania.

My fieldwork with WIBDI showed the organic efforts to be difficult on the ground. The organization has a network of 300 farms throughout the country, gathering fine mats and products for soap from all islands, and sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables mostly from Upolu. I accompanied some of the volunteers on farm visits, filling baskets as part of the Farm to Table Program (FTTP). As we visited farms, WIBDI's volunteers gave me their take on conventional and organic foods. Norma Tauilili, an office assistant, gave me one example: "oranges [in the US] are big and perfect with chemicals, would you eat them?" (2016). Vargas Rasch, a volunteer, joined in: "they inject cows with chemicals, too...would you eat them?" (2016). In our conversation both worked to appeal to me by telling the backstory of my food, making my response a matter of ethics and conscience.

Organic practices seemed to be popular among Samoan farmers, and Rasch and Tauilili had views that many other interviewees shared. Madda Magbity, a volunteer at WIBDI from Jamaica, noted that there was already a village in Savai'i that had a taboo against spraying crops, and that if an organization or the government were to delegate organic agriculture efforts, there would be much potential for development (2016). However, as Me noted, the government was slow to move forward in these initiatives. "We're hoping they'll open their eyes soon," she said, alluding to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), which has proposed an organics task force but has not moved forward with the plan (2016).

According to Mateiliti Leaana, of the MAF, the organics task force will be implemented in fiscal year 2017/18 (2016). A major setback, he noted, has been a lack of knowledge and resources in the country: many skills and resources are only available abroad, which has resulted in brain drain and loss of talent as Samoans leave to gather skills. As chefs, farmers, and organizations like the FAO, WIBDI and the MAF move forward on their particular paths, organic may be undefined, redefined, and pulled in different directions as they interact with each other.

While Leaana cites a need to educate farmers on how to be organic, it seems that for the most part, organic farming is not a matter of becoming for farmers, but rather, as Oliver suggests, one of continuing-to-be. A major reason that farming methods continue to be organic and traditional is land tenure: 80% of land in Samoa is customary, which means that it belongs to the extended families who have lived on it since pre-colonial times (Levi 2016). This translates to about 800 square miles of land divided among families and villages in Samoa. Thus, organic is not only farming tradition, it is also a symbol of communalism, and of sharing the resources of the islands among those who live there.

This does not mean that conventional agriculture does not exist. In fact, herbicides have found their way to Samoa, and have spread to many villages and farms. Malcolm Hazelman, secretary of the Federated Farmers Incorporated in Samoa, describes the herbicide as “a good thing turned bad,” noting that what was initially introduced as a weedkiller is now the main means of suicide among farmers (Hazelman 2016). Because research often does not reach farmers, and there are “never enough government workers to do the job,” new technology either goes unused, or is repurposed, often in a detrimental way (Hazelman 2016).

Organic becomes a rejection of new products, and a continued adherence to traditional ways—either out of choice or lack of access. Many new inventions do decrease labor, and so as larger farms take shape on freehold land (land that does not belong to a family or village), they utilize conventional methods. Because conventional ways save time, organic becomes not only a matter of tradition, but of community and family involvement. More people are needed per acre to farm organic, necessitating a smaller farm size, and labor done by many.

With this web of meanings in mind, organic becomes the backstory to food served by chefs. It is the story of how that food came to be, a story that, from the name organic, will communicate a different message to different cultures, but which in this culture suggests time, work, and tradition. It is not a lack [of chemicals] so much as it is the presence of Samoan history and values continuing to unfold.

To better understand the story of food as it may be interpreted by chefs, and communicated to the eater, I turn to the stories of some of chefs I met during my visit. By engaging with a growing discourse around farm to table in Samoa, I found that each chef has a different interpretation of what the phrase means. Gaining an understanding of organic farming helps us to understand the beginning of a food’s journey, but to analyze a chef’s values, we must examine what the farm to table path might look like, as well as what a chef signifies by “farm” and “table.”

CHAPTER SIX: FARM TO TABLE- THREE STORIES

Vanya Taule'alo- Garden to Table

I arranged a meeting with Vanya Taule'alo, owner of Legends Café, after hearing from medical students that her restaurant was one of the best spots on the island. They, like me, were *palagi*, and stuck to many stereotypes of the demographic, being that they are ready to spend money, they stick to speaking English rather than learning Samoan, and they enjoy “health foods.” Their position as foreign medical students also suggested that they were conscious of their health, just as I, a *palagi* raised on a farm, am conscious of where my food comes from.

With these impressions in mind, I took a bus from the city center to near her establishment, which is set back from the main road, and has no posters advertising it. In fact, none of the locals I asked knew where the restaurant was, and I needed to backtrack a few times to find “the road next to the swamp.” When I arrived, Vanya sent one of “her boys” (she has a staff of around three young men in their early twenties) to drive fifteen feet through her driveway to pick me up in the car, as the driveway was flooded and she would not let me walk across. I was the only one at the restaurant, which doubled as her art studio, and I waited as she delegated to her staff. Taule'alo is a presence: blond hair, stylish clothes, and an imposing Samoan build, topped off with a New Zealand accent (she was born in New Zealand). Her restaurant, though an island at the time of my visit, is normally in the middle of a garden, and my first question was about the things that she was growing. I had given her one of my surveys, as well, and rather than have a dialogue about her story in general, she structured her responses on the survey questions.

When discussing her menu, Taule'alo described her system as the Robert Oliver approach to food, capitalizing on local flavors and staples (Taule'alo 2016). In addition to being “ethical, fresh, local, and seasonal,” her restaurant has a heavy health focus, which not only appeals to health-conscious food tourists—a growing market—but also provides locals with healthier renditions of old favorites. For instance, fish and chips has been a recent menu addition, at request of clientele. When I met with her, Taule'alo expressed how little she likes fish and chips, and how much it hurt her to put it on the menu. For her, clients asking for fish and chips was a vote against the recipes she developed, and its popularity was bittersweet. While the success of the dish spoke also to the success of its avant-garde ingredients, such as taro chips and breadfruit fry batter, with local chutneys, it also suggested the resistance to change in the local community. New or different recipes still had not gained ground, although her turmeric/ginger lemonade and smoothies met with growing popularity.

Taule'alo's restaurant was a success among foreigners and growing in popularity among upper-class Samoans.²⁰ While it is reasonable that these demographics would be attracted to her cuisine, her new healthy renditions of classic meals are not reaching the middle and lower classes. Those I interviewed expressed the wish to improve the health of their country, but those of lower classes, who live in food deserts and have alarmingly high obesity and diabetes rates, may never see health improvements through what they eat. They do not yet have the income and opportunity to eat at Legends or any of the other organic or farm to table establishments, and so they will

²⁰ When we asked Samoans about a social or economic class system, most claimed that because it was a communalist culture, there were no social classes. However, these people always came from wealthy backgrounds, and thus may have found it easier to ignore poverty of wealth and opportunity that many citizens faced. Minimum wage in Samoa is around \$2 per hour, and likely less for independent farmers. This is about the cost of a Taxi soda, while dishes at Taule'alo's restaurant start at \$15, and a full dinner can come close to \$100.

continue to buy dangerous foods and ignore the potential of their backyards for improving their health. Taule'alo, like other chefs I interviewed, noted price and value, refusing to lower the price of her meals. "I won't produce a soup for ten tala because I don't think it will be done properly," she told me (Taule'alo 2016). Ten tala is a reasonable price for a "fast food" meal, and is widely bought among working Samoans, but her refusal to lower the price of something so valuable, coupled with the difficulty of a lower-class Samoan being able to afford her meals, creates an impasse for improvements to national health with her system. Unless everyone begins to grow their own garden and model their home cooking after Taule'alo, the system is unlikely to change.

Joe Lam- Dancing the Island Shuffle

Joe Lam, owner of Scalini's restaurant, an Italian-style upper-class establishment on the outskirts of Apia, expressed similar views and approaches to Taule'alo, although his systems seemed to garner so much success that he was able to expand them to include other restaurants. When I mentioned fish and chips, he expressed an opinion similar to Taule'alo, and said that the only way to deal with the popular meal was to slowly extract it from the menu, weaning clientele off of it as they develop a taste for other dishes and ingredients. He then referenced costs, noting that for families with children, fish and chips is both popular and cost-efficient, which serves to then increase its popularity even further. His restaurant was popular more among upper-class Samoans than tourists, and often served Italian-inspired dishes with ingredients sourced in Samoa. His veal roulade recently won the award for best locally-inspired dish in the country, and featured staples like pumpkin, taro, and palusami.

When Lam sat down to talk with me, his restaurant was midway through a leisurely lunch. He addressed FTT directly: "Farm to table is a funny concept in Samoa because that's our life," he began. "It is a healthier choice, but it's always been our choice" (Lam 2016). From the start, Lam linked FTT with tradition, as had Oliver in his books. A return to organic and local food was a return to tradition, and a departure from dangerous modern foodways such as import dependence and heavy intake of processed goods. History played a heavy hand in the modern food system, as Lam described: imports, he believed, began most with his generation, which was introduced to processed foods abroad, and brought the taste for them back home.

New foods like corned beef and chips are high in fat and sugar, but apparently nondescript in calories, creating what Wilson calls *the calorie delusion*. This phenomenon relates processed food to its natural caloric equivalent, demonstrating that even though the two have the same number of calories, it takes less energy to chew and digest processed food than it does to digest natural food. Recent studies have demonstrated that animals like rats and pythons have had greater tendency to become obese when eating processed foods rather than unprocessed alternatives (Wilson 2014:xviii). Lam's own personal observations have yielded similar conclusions: Samoans, who tend to eat more processed food than other cultures, have gotten an international reputation for their large size.

In a few allusions to his family and his culture, as it shifted from high-calorie work abroad to the relatively sedentary lifestyle that many lead at home, Lam expressed his concerns about processed imports. However, his operation was not completely farm to table, if by the term I refer to food coming from a single farm and going to a single table. While Lam described his home garden enthusiastically, and detailed the produce he was able to "subsidize" with it, he was never idealistic about the work that needed to be put into farming. For him, it came down to a fundamental question: "do I want to be a grower, or do I want to be a chef?" (Lam 2016). Each

would consume his life, and he preferred to dedicate himself to the latter, despite the importance of the former.

And so, knowing that he could not do both, Lam has established an intricate web for his business, as well as others that he consults with. As he began the story of his network, he gave me what he considered necessary cultural background: “Local workers get complacent,” he began. “We have this habit of growing a paddock of tomatoes, and then sitting back and enjoying the money” (Lam 2016). At least 70% of farmers in Samoa are like this, he told me, joking “I just hope that half are doing this one year and half the other.” In other words, one of the most significant setbacks to a successful local food system is the mentality around money and profit.

Unlike many capitalist cultures, Samoa is communalist, which means that individual wealth or personal gain have little significance, while community well-being has a great deal. In the Samoan context, the individual (*'o le tagata*) is seen as both a product of a lineage and a piece of a communal whole, and therefore that person’s decisions will be motivated by the benefit to the community, rather than accruing personal wealth (Va’a 2009:238). The phenomenon can be seen in a new form as Samoa’s remittance economy has taken shape. As in other Oceanic nations, younger family members may go abroad to work, and remit money back to their families. This system, built on a system of reciprocity and interdependence, has become a major part of family income in the country (Connell and Brown 2005:5). With such a system already in place, the need to work for profit is not strong, rather, the ability to sustain and enjoy the money once one has it prevails.

In the view of a Samoan farmer this system is a way to garner enough to have what one’s family needs and wants, or perhaps supplement with remittances. Fuimaono Me, at WIBDI, shared similar stories to Lam in this area, which she had encountered through the farm to table program at the nonprofit. Me gave me her impression of the mentality: “I have food today and I have money, so I don’t bother to pick what’s in the farm for extra” (2016). In other words, she reported, there are often times when Samoan farmers do not come through with supplies because “they are not hungry,” and therefore feel no urgency to have a reliable crop.

For Lam, and for WIBDI, this phenomenon results in an unreliable supply chain. As someone who, like Taule’alo, spent time working in New Zealand, Lam had experience in dealing with a web of suppliers for a business, and working long hours to make the business a success. While he is now successful in his home country, his references to the Samoan mentality around agriculture suggested that he had worked hard to bring reliability to his network. While he saw logic behind the mantra of “when it’s ready, we use it,” and the refusal of Samoans to work in colonial times, since “they would rather relax than farm for six pence,” the inconsistency in planting was not something on which a chef could compromise (Lam 2016).

He called it the “island shuffle”—taking one step forward and two steps back. He could establish a contact for his restaurant one day, but then, when harvest was done and no future crop had been planted, he would be beholden to the farmer, who would not plant until they ran out of money once more. Thus, a step forward with a contact and food source, a step back with the wait for the next crop, and a step back in his restaurant’s reliability and relationship with the grower. The Shuffle may put on a good show, but it will not comfort a business owner, nor will it encourage clientele: Lam believes that the reason that so many Samoans crave imported goods is that “they know how the system works.” The Samoans know the Shuffle, and when they want consistent supply they turn to imports.

Nevertheless, over time Lam worked to build relationships and ensure consistency, and helped other hotels and restaurants to do so. For a new hotel on Savai’i, the other major island of

the country, Lam worked to source products within a two-mile radius. He started by establishing a relationship between the owners and their neighbors, and within the first month, 90% of produce was locally-sourced. In this case, Lam understood the Shuffle and used the priorities and communal nature of the locals to his advantage: when the neighbors saw that the hotel needed fish, they suggested their sons. Since it is more difficult to get exports to Savai'i (there is an additional step in the process, as products must be shipped to Upolu, the main island, and then go by truck and ferry to the second), food is already locally-sourced, and there is a good supply because of the large size of families. Lam made the supply a bit bigger, and with the interconnectedness of Samoan society, set in action a plan that would flourish on local relationships and community welfare.

In all of his systems, Lam had a sort of privilege that came from his time abroad and his upscale restaurant. His clientele's high economic bracket solidified this, and when he explained that he could ensure consistency and efficiency by "paying a little bit more," I was not surprised. He still had his difficulties, though: "I miss being able to call up [a farmer] saying I want x bushels of corn and x tomatoes, and having it be on my doorstep when I get home" (Lam 2016). Thus, while he had established relationships and reciprocal systems, the Samoan view of work still could threaten to upset his balance.

Taula Beverages: "Local is Local"

If you drink beer in Samoa, you are either on team Taula or team Vailima. Taula is part of a larger company initiated by the government, while Vailima is a company that is independent from the government, but which was recently purchased by the Coca-Cola Company. Both have hoppy and malty varieties, but if the drinker's decision is political, choosing which bottle to open is a nuanced decision.

I decided to go to Taula breweries not solely for beer but for chickens. Because of land tenure²¹ in Samoa, the large-scale chicken operation run by Ah Liki (connected with Taula) could be a significant change in local meat sourcing, and thus in farm to table operations. My interview with two associates at Taula gave me their perspective on the chicken situation: most of the chicken in the country is from the US, and Samoans have become so dependent on the imported meat that if the US were to cut its export, half of Samoa's population would starve. While this may have tended toward hyperbole, Yu and Mahimpur made the dependence on chicken clear, and used the idea of dependence to talk about their views on new food trends. They used the term *commercial viability*, discussing how production price can impact selling price. For instance, if Ah Liki were to raise free range chickens, they would need to triple the retail price of chicken meat. The same would be true for eggs. While local eggs have superior nutrients and taste, they would cost three times as much as their counterparts, and locals would not buy them.

What Yu and Mahimpur seemed to be skirting around with this justification was the nutritive and economic value of small-scale local and farm to table initiatives. As members of a large-scale business enterprise, they focused on "feeding the masses," and stimulating the local economy, rather than using descriptions of taste as chefs tended to do. A large company means stability, stability means jobs for Samoans, who can then afford to buy more food (perhaps buying chicken and continuing the cycle). Ah Liki thus creates a system of reliability and interdependence through its large-scale structure, rather than the smaller-scale ones of the chefs I interviewed. It

²¹ Land is held by extended families in Samoa, making it difficult to establish large-scale agricultural operations. The center of Upolu has a larger amount of freehold land, which has recently made these operations a possibility.

stimulates the local economy, but also dominates it, and suggests that certain power dynamics would cement themselves as the business continued to grow.

We soon turned our conversation to soda, which is also produced at the site. Taxi is the soda-equivalent of Taula beer, and is popular throughout the country. In a rainbow of colors, the bright, lightly-carbonated beverage caters to Samoans' penchant for sugar, which was cultivated first by the American product, Shasta. Shasta was founded in the US in 1889, and presumably introduced to the island during WWII (shastapop.com). "Samoans are colorful people," Yu began, "and Taxi comes in colors that can match people's personalities" (Yu and Mahimpur 2016). Taxi seeks to embrace the diversity of Samoans, while Taula (which means "anchor") harkens back to tradition and culture.

As Yu and Mahimpur lauded the soda and the company for its innovative marketing and popular taste, I decided to address the elephant in the room: "but do you make the ingredients in Samoa?"

In fact, they do not, and the same applies to the non-breadfruit beer. Hops and the colors/sweeteners for Taxi are all imported from overseas, to have the taste of foreign products with which they compete. However, the important part of these Ah Liki products is that they are 95% water. "And that's Samoan water," quipped Mahimpur. Both acknowledged that the island population would be neither sustained nor satisfied with Vailima Natural, the competitor's breadfruit beer, and that Ah Liki had devised the best business model for having that coveted international taste while putting most of the production back into the local economy (Yu and Mahimpur 2016).

While Lam and Taule'alo placed their focus in part on the quality of food and environmental impact, Ah Liki seemed to place most of its focus on its business model, and working on the local economy. When Yu told me that "local is local," he referred to the local families that were employed at the Taxi factory, not the local ingredients they sourced (2016). The paths that the chefs decided to take from farm to table originated with a local farmer and ended at a table at their restaurant. Ah Liki's path, from the priorities they described, focused more on putting food on an employee's table by ensuring that a Taxi made it to the table of a consumer. Thus, while food traveled from the farm to the table of Lam and Taule'alo, money and a means of sustenance traveled to local tables with Ah Liki.

The irony of this chapter, and of the concept of farm to table in Samoa, is that traditional Samoan culture does not have tables. There is a Samoan word for table (*laulau*, which can also refer to a food platter or the act of serving food). As with my conversations about organic produce, my discussions about farm to table were interactions in which I and my interviewees were using the same vocabulary, but intending different meanings. These stories demonstrate that the idea of a table has taken on different meanings for different people in the food system, and suggests that some may not mean table as it is understood in English. In the Samoan context, this table may be a metaphor, or may take on one of the other dimensions of *laulau*, crafting a platter of food or catching a chef or distributor in the act of serving.

As these are only three of the many stories there are to tell in Samoa, it is important that we continually examine and question this farm to table trajectory. Each system has its own matrices of power, and by understanding the dynamics of the system through its pathway from farm to "table," we may better understand the priorities and powers at play. For instance, as chef Dan

Barber notes, settings which prioritize supply to a restaurant may prove taxing to the farmer: “the farmer ends up servicing the table, not the other way around” (2014:15).

Further, we must examine identity: who is the farmer? Who sits at the table, and who does not? While men traditionally work at plantations, WIBDI has changed the identity of farmers, encouraging the agricultural and economic initiatives of Samoan women. Most of the chefs in Oliver’s books are women, and he even has a section called “Desperate Housewives” in *Mea’ai Samoa*. Is the beginning of the farm to table journey a redefined domesticity? It will take more research to answer these questions, but WIBDI and Oliver, behind their empowerment, have given rise to questions that may reshape feminine identity in Samoa, especially in the agricultural and culinary culture of the country.

A gender switch is also occurring in food preparation. Traditionally, the preparation of the umu is the duty of Samoan men, who serve as chiefs of the family and as political heads. However, women traditionally assumed the duty of mixing ‘ava (kava, a root drink with sedative properties) and trained in social graces, traditional dance, and custom. As *taupo*, a young woman would serve as the focal point of a ceremony, while the *tamaitai* (highest female position, usually wife of a *matai*) served as head of hospitality and tradition. As women move to the forefront of Samoan cuisine, it could be this aspect of hospitality and cultural authority deriving from their traditional gender roles that propels them forward as authorities of foodways.

For tourists sitting at the “table” of this evolving system, a dichotomy of host and guest arises, with expectations of each party based on its positionality. The guest is a stranger, and may enter a situation as an unknown, with the hosts uncertain of the guest’s knowledge of their culture (Pitt-Rivers 1977:99). On the other hand, the hosts may evaluate a guest based on appearance, working from stereotypes about the background of the guest in order to determine how to serve them.

In the context of food tourism, the guest at the table is there to enact an exchange, paying the chef for a meal, and changing the interaction from that between a host and a mysterious guest who comes with nothing to that of a guest who elicits a service from a host. If the guest is a tourist, this service is food that is an “authentic” representation of a culture. This authenticity may derive from a culture invented by tourism and the tourist, meaning that the tourist pays for a certain type of hospitality, and an anticipated authenticity (Yamashita 2003:150).

It is impossible to discuss the guest at the table, especially the foreign guest, without discussing how tourism has come to influence Samoan food. Restaurants have developed unique ways of presenting Samoan cuisine to locals and tourists alike, editing and rewriting cultural culinary texts in order to host and satisfy the tastes of visitors.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TOURISM

*This tradition is our mission
And Moana there's so much to do
Don't trip on the taro root
That's all you need
We share everything we make
We joke and we weave our baskets
The fishermen come back from the sea...
That's all you need*

-Lyrics from "Where You Are," *Moana* (2016)

The premiere of the new Disney film, *Moana*, was much anticipated in Samoa, and lauded for its Oceanic actors.²² Beginning with the portrayal of village contented with its lush, well-resourced island, the film shares compelling parallels with the food culture that chefs are working to reinvigorate, as well as the vibrant island lifestyle that foreign tourists seek when they travel to the country. As a "tourist" myself, that is, a temporary foreign visitor traveling to another culture in order to learn, I felt throughout my fieldwork that there might be an interplay between chefs' revival of "authentic" food culture and the healthy fruits and vegetables that tourists expect to find on an island. Since *Moana* shows an island people preparing and serving local, natural²³ fruits and vegetables.

For visitors to the capital city of Apia, the quintessential Samoan village can be easily accessed through the Cultural Center, which has created a model village featuring the traditional activities for which Samoa is known: tattooing, dance, 'ava, and the umu. Kilisi "Chris" Solemuno, in charge of the Samoan Cultural Village, described his hopes of immersing tourists in all aspects of Samoan food culture through the village: "so many things they see will question their mind, and we beg them to ask any question whatsoever" (Solemuno 2016). The goal, he continued, was to give tourists "an idea of what, who, and how we are," in a way that is a marked departure from the bars, restaurants, and clubs that have settled along Apia's sea wall (Freeman 1983).

The umu is a central aspect to traditional Samoan life, and has become a key feature of the Cultural Village experience, as well. Because of the growing number of visitors, most of the food is pre-made, with a sample taro and *palusami* on the fire. Describing the tour, Solemuno explained that he tries to make the experience relatable for tourists, describing taro as a Samoan potato, demonstrating how Samoans climb coconut trees and make coconut cream, and represent 'ava through dance to show "what we do daily in order to survive" (2016). The cultural village gives visitors a basis of Samoan food culture through its umu, while restaurants build on the concept of the umu in their creative portrayals of staple foods.

Gmelch defines tourism as "temporary travel for the purpose of experiencing a change," and notes how cultures will emphasize their uniqueness, as well as that of their location (2004:20).

²² "moana" means "ocean" in Samoan, and one might argue that there are important parallels between the themes of the film and the messages of Epeli Hau'ofa, who made similar arguments about peoples of the sea, and of voyaging peoples within a sea of islands (1994)

²³ While the term "natural," like "sustainable," has become rather ambiguous, it can here be understood to signify a product that comes directly from nature. In other words, a coconut picked from a tree is natural, but canned coconut milk is less so. Similarly, roasting a freshly-caught fish on an umu is natural, while opening a can of tinned herring (a Samoan favorite) is not.

Solemuno explained the cultural village as a way to immerse and engage tourists in a fast and accessible way, which provided an easy context for learning about Samoa, without language barriers or social rules. The cultural village is more accessible to tourists than an actual village because staff are ready and willing to answer all questions, and can do so in a way that puts culture in the tourists' terms (2016). Like *Moana* and Oliver's books, Solemuno is working to define an "us" for visitors to become acquainted with.

This "us" created by islanders sharply contrasts with the Other crafted by visitors. In the food world, the most abrasive visitor may be Andrew Zimmern of the show *Bizarre Foods*. As the episode on Samoa flashes through food items, we hear his voice begin: "you just don't get any more primitive than this!" (Zimmern 2008). The rest of the episode demonstrates how Zimmern finds exactly what he was looking for, from barbecuing bats on a "deserted island" to eating the hearts of fish. In both scenes, it is Zimmern who initiates the foraging and eating, while his Samoan contacts look on, amused.

Zimmern's fishing trip is particularly entertaining, and is introduced by a voiceover: "I've checked out the harbor, talked with the locals, and I know exactly the boat I want for my Samoan fishing adventure."

After he and the captain reel in a few yellowfin tuna, the captain's son turns to Zimmern, asking "what's the most disgusting thing you've ever eaten?"

"Disgusting is a word I never use," begins Zimmern, then reconsidering. "Why? What did you have in mind?"

"The heart!" says the son. As he rips out the heart, we hear another voiceover by Zimmern, noting that a heart is "familiar food" for him, but that the yellowfin heart is unique because it is caught fresh off the shores of Samoa.

The real treat for the crew comes with the eye of the fish, which Zimmern rips from the socket, after describing its sacredness in many cultures. As the captain tells him to squeeze lime on it, then suck on it, his sons grin in the background, glancing at each other and seeming to suppress laughter. As Zimmern seeks to eat every oddity in sight, describing himself as Robinson Crusoe, it seems that his Samoan contacts are just along for the ride (Zimmern 2008).

Fortunately, Zimmern is an outlier in food culture encounters of Samoa, and Oliver's books align more closely with Solemuno's description of Samoan food and tourists. In my interview with Oliver, he repeated the theme of Samoa's rich environment, saying that resources were everywhere, and that "everything grows here" (Solemuno 2016). The chefs he has worked with want to elevate the Samoan identity and economy, and make locals and foreigners value cuisine. In doing so, chefs can create positive change within the community, stabilizing the economy and improving the health of locals through reprioritizing foods.

In fact, many survey respondents reported that local food had a greater nutritional value than imported food. By this, they refer to products that are locally-grown, rather than items that are popular to consume on the islands. Papaya, coconut and taro are local foods, but corned beef and spam, despite their wide-ranging popularity, are imports. Linking local food with health benefits has had little success in changing diets and food habits of locals, but holds promise for attracting tourists in search of "authentic" and healthy island cuisine (Fields 2002:38).

Oliver echoes the theme that local is healthy in his books. When introducing the Pacific chefs he has met, he describes the potential impact of their cuisine: "I picture plugging them into the economic energy of tourism, and seeing them blaze into greater light and life, the whole South Pacific shining with a healthy sustainable glow" (Oliver 2010:16). Sustainable systems thus attract

tourists *and* enhance the touristic experience, and the pioneers of the current sustainable food system will build a strong foundation for a developing tourism sector.

Or, by building a foundation for food tourism, these chefs will create a new Samoan culture, one that departs from current foodways in an attempt to feed tourists the “island food” they have been searching for. Visitors from Margaret Mead to Andrew Zimmern have cast Samoa as an exotic, tropical, and lush destination, and their accounts have contributed to what Urry terms the “tourist gaze.” Yamashita, an anthropologist focusing on tourism in Bali, rearticulates the concept as a tourist’s framing of a locale, to reshape nature and culture (2003:15). Mead’s reframing of the culture was through an exotic, sexually-charged lens, while Zimmern focuses on the exotic-as-other through his episode of *Bizarre Foods* (Mead 1928, Zimmern 2008). As Yamashita notes with the growing tourism endeavors of Bali, there is a fear among locals that culture will be lost to tourism. Hawai’i is often cited by developing island nations, which fear becoming a “second Waikiki” (Yamashita 2003:54). Thus, food culture may evolve in some restaurants to become a fusion of what the tourists hope to find and Samoa’s actual foodways.

Oliver describes Samoa’s traditional cuisine as “straightforward but profound...the best of earth and ocean,” painting a picture of an lush and bountiful past threatened by the flat tastes that Samoan chefs worked to give European visitors as “tourist food” (2013a:14). Describing Samoa as “awash with fat, flour, fake foods, and Fanta,” Oliver seeks to reassert the vibrancy of Samoan cuisine in his book, highlighting the recipes of local chefs (2013:15). The recipes that follow have the notable tendency of quoting and citing European dishes, despite the assertion of Samoa’s tasty ingredients. In both books, we see recipes like *koko Samoa*²⁴ cake, sorbet, and even gnocchi, in the hands of local chefs, creating what Yamashita terms an “internationalization of food” (Yamashita 2003:79).

From my interviews with restaurant owners, the internationalization does not only emerge from the interactions that Samoans have with tourist culture, but also with the personal experiences of chefs and business owners. Both Lam and Taule’alo spent time in New Zealand, and quote Italian recipes in their featured dishes: Taule’alo’s café, *Legends*, features an eggplant parmesan, while Lam has developed a breadfruit gnocchi, and is nationally-recognized for his lamb roulade. Because of the country’s size and economic position, people are more likely to go abroad to either work for remittances²⁵ or to work with international organizations. Most travel is to New Zealand and Australia, but I noticed in my interviews many connections with Italy. Lam shared that his cousins have a restaurant on the Spanish steps in Rome, and another chef, who owned a restaurant on the harbor, described growing up in Venice.

Because Samoan culture has evolved with globalization, “authentic” dishes have evolved, as well. Traditional staples are still featured at restaurants, but because they are made of the traditional umu, they are more often quoted within a larger dish, rather than served by themselves, due to the lack of umu in restaurant kitchens and the accessibility of the dish at home. Homestays and ecotourism spots will feature dishes like *palusami*, but restaurants will feature the recipe on a more involved plate. *Palusami* has thus found its way into pesto, ravioli, beef Wellington, and Lam’s acclaimed roulade.

The idea of an authentic Samoan dish has changed over time, especially in terms of a dish that is both authentic and appealing to tourists. Bruner notes that it is the tourist that determines

²⁴ Chocolate made from Samoan cacao

²⁵ Remittances are a major part of the GDP, and many families depend on members working abroad to send financial support

authenticity over time (2005:154), but here it is what locals think the tourists will want, and what they want, themselves.

In the mid-20th century, “Samoan” dishes fed to tourists were imports and fish and chips, brought over by the palates of soldiers in WWII. The word *pisupo*, which mostly specifies corned beef but also refers to canned food, comes from the Campbell’s pea soup introduced by US soldiers (Oliver 2010:75). Fish and chips pervaded restaurants as something that Samoans and *palagi* want, even though chefs acknowledged that the dish was not Samoan. However, priorities have been shifting, and the binary of healthy:unhealthy parallels not only local:imported but now authentic:inauthentic.

This “new authentic” Samoan food becomes food made exclusively with local ingredients, “for people who don’t want Coke,” as Taule’alo put it (2016). I found my identity as *palagi* to be a factor in shaping what chefs recommended me from their menu. Taule’alo noted that her food was very popular among foreigners, who especially enjoyed her *sasalapa* (soursop) smoothie—she pushed me to try it as well (Taule’alo 2016).

This fusion of dishes-in-transition could be exemplified especially in fish and chips, a dish brought over from New Zealand that has become a staple at local restaurants. Lam and Taule’alo seemed to define the quality of their cooking and taste by first expressing their aversion to the dish, but Taule’alo showed me how she met customer demands while adhering to her ideals: her fish and chips features local fish, coconut-based batter, and taro or breadfruit chips. This creates a balance for the dish between the new authentic (since all of the ingredients are Samoan) and the touristic palate. This redefined fish and chips “speaks to the fact that it comes from Samoa,” and might serve to ease less-adventurous tourists into the foodways of the islands (Taule’alo 2016).

Bruner notes the difference between authenticity and tourist realism, the latter being what tourists expect to experience (2005:49). There is so much variation among Samoan food that one’s realism will depend on which eating venue is chosen: at the Cultural Village or in a real village, one might expect to sit on the floor and eat *palusami* straight from an umu. However, the originality of each restaurant’s approach to Samoan food suggests that chefs, from their experiences with *palagi*, are basing their menus off of *what they think the tourist’s realism will be*. As a *palagi* I experienced the realism even outside of my research: one hotel owner, thinking I was a foreign food critic, hosted me for dinner at her hotel so that I could sample her Beef Wellington seasoned with *palusami*.

This quest to present the authentic to the expectant foreigner couples with the pursuit of traditional meals expressed as a healthy local alternative to imports. Lam and Taule’alo both noted that their main goal was to gradually shift the palates of Samoans into preferring healthier menu items. While they wanted foreign visitors to enjoy their food, this was not the main priority. When they, and when Oliver, mentioned local dishes, it typically accompanied a rejection of imported products, which they saw as turning Oceania into “a dumping ground” for the West (Oliver 2010:29). Healthy food reclaimed local products, and vice versa. These chefs’ overarching goal when it came to serving tourists was to demonstrate that Samoan cuisine was healthy, serving them smoothies or salads, and to make popular local dishes more nutritious in the process.

Despite the many potential changes that will accompany greater tourism to the country, it is important to note the kind of tourist that I have been characterizing here. These potential tourists in search of healthy or exotic foods would be, for the most part, foreigners from New Zealand, Australia, or various parts of Europe. These demographics currently make up a smaller portion of the tourist population in Samoa than do visiting friend and relatives (VFRs). While the foreign

tourists may push food culture in one direction, VFRs may push back in another direction, since they travel to the country in search of foods from childhood, products of their heritage or foods that their family members enjoy. And this may not be the same type of food that we see with other tourists.

A response to this food nostalgia of Samoans living abroad can already be found in new export products shipped to New Zealand and Australia. One of Ah Liki's new initiatives is a canned *palusami*, sent to New Zealand for Samoans who may not have access to the taro and coconut of their relatives, but who crave the food for a Sunday *toona 'i*. WIBDI was in the process of fundraising for a factory to make more value-added products (VAPs) to send abroad, which could result in more preserving—literally—of Samoan food culture.

This other demographic of tourists, who come to Samoa to embrace their heritage, rather than to “explore” a new place, could suggest a pushback against new efforts for healthier, organic produce. Family members living abroad, whether in the US, Australia, New Zealand, or even American Samoa, return to the island looking for *keke saina*,²⁶ *keke pua'a*,²⁷ and various chip products that are hard to find elsewhere. These tourists may eat at home, or frequent restaurants with a different style of food, rather than gravitating toward the healthy or organic messages pushed by some chefs. Since the other demographic of tourists is projected to grow, tensions in the image of Samoan food may arise as *palagi* push in one direction and VFRs push in another.

²⁶ “China cake,” an onion-based, flower-shaped cookie

²⁷ Pork-filled sticky buns

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Last January (2017), the Torba province of the Oceanic nation of Vanuatu proposed a ban on all foreign food imports. Luc Dini, a community leader and head of the tourism council in the mostly subsistence region, initiated the ban, citing the poor health problems caused by foreign foods in comparison with the rich and nutritious (and organic) local diet. The move made international news, and with it, in each article, was Dini's anecdote:

In other provinces that have adopted Western junk food diets you see pretty young girls but when they smile they have rotten teeth, because the sugar has broken down their teeth. We don't want that to happen here and we don't want to develop the illnesses that come with a western junk food diet. (qtd. Roy 2017)

Dini goes on to characterize his home as a culinary utopia, abounding with everything necessary for a healthy diet.

Vanuatu lies at a similar latitude line to Samoa, but has a French colonial history, and its isolation has resulted in foods “that are essentially unchanged, and don't need to be changed” (Oliver 2010:215). However, the themes discussed in this project find their echoes in Dini and his rhetoric—we can recognize that smiling Pacific girl from the covers of Oliver's books. We read from the article's title that “the islands *go organic*,” when, on closer observation, we see that they have been organic all along (Roy 2017). Finally, we see that there is attention and care placed on what is going from the farm to the table, and in this case, the table serves not only the people of Torba, but all visitors to the province.

Thus, while the islands are 1,400 miles apart, there is a shared rhetoric and cultural value present in their local movements. With figures like Robert Oliver working to spread awareness of island cuisines, it would not surprise me to see the ripples Torba is making create waves throughout the waters of Oceania, building on the movements already growing amongst chefs in other areas.

In Samoa, these movements continue to grow, as cruise ships add Apia to their itineraries, and wifi hotspots enable chefs to amplify their voices. This new globalization does not mean that Samoa will forsake processed imports, nor does it mean that the country will go organic. However, a changing world will compel chefs, farmers, and eaters to make decisions about the type of food they want to grow and eat, and what they want to feed to each other and guests.

I conclude with themes drawn from the previous chapters of this piece, which can help us move forward in understanding Samoa's cuisine as a case study. My research in Apia and Robert Oliver's publications on Samoan cuisine and that of other areas in Oceania both draw on and contribute to the areas of organic foodways, the concept of farm to table, and the interplay of culture and tourism.

In Samoa there is no single perspective on what “organic” means in terms of agriculture and cuisine, but the term has come to signify the traditions and heritage of Samoa as expressed through agriculture. Organic growing does not take on the connotations of a privileged alternative to conventional agriculture, but rather a people's continued resistance to colonization by embracing its own ways of being. Organic as a concept gives food an extra dimension: when food is served, the question is not only *what* it is, but *how* it is, as well. A focus on this type of agriculture treats the growing and context of each dish with care.

Farm to table is expressed in myriad ways in Samoa, and can best be analyzed through understanding what the farm and “table” look like in each case. The structure of a system depends on the priorities and paths taken by the restaurateur/chef, as they determine who will cultivate their

produce, and who will be served at the table. The three interviews featured in this piece each interpret the concept in their own way, and create a farm to table path unique to their priorities, background, and tastes.

Finally, the two previous themes play into tourism and the production of an “authentic” dish for visitors. As with organics and farm to table, there is no single, concrete way to characterize how restaurants cater to tourism in Samoa. However, through the nuances emerge themes of rearticulating traditional foods into new recipes, turning foreign favorites into spotlights on Samoan ingredients, and balancing the familiar and the exotic in each unique experience. The dishes offered at a restaurant become more than the food they are composed of as chefs work to anticipate what their eaters expect, and how far into a food culture they are willing to go.

The interplay of local and global may create a “new authentic” for Samoa, one in which dishes that have not been traditionally served become staples that typify the country. We may already see this happening with breadfruit beer, fish and [taro] chips, and *koko Samoa* cake. These dishes are not “traditional” in the way that Samoans usually employ the word, but have come to represent the new Samoan identity. While they alter the food system and palate of the islands, what I see as important in these new items is how they continue to embrace the ingredients of the islands. While they are new ways of assembling ingredients, they pay homage to the agricultural and environmental heritage of the islands, and in doing so, they *become* authentic.

As more tourists seek out Samoa as a destination, and more people take their seat at the table, I look forward to seeing how cuisine, agriculture, and the links between the two progress. Since my time in Samoa, the island has found itself in the international spotlight with the film *Moana*, which may lead to an influx of tourists, and an influx of new expectations of what Samoan culture and cuisine should be. I hope that more stories find their voices as Samoan chefs continue preparing food for their guests, sharing their culture and perspectives with new listeners. For now, I give my contacts and friends thanks for their hospitality, their stories, and of course, their food.

Fa'afetai le fa'aaloalo.

Fa'afetai talanoaga.

Fa'afetai mea'ai.

Thank you for the hospitality.

Thank you for the conversations.

Thank you for the food.

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APPENDIX

A. Restaurant Survey

Name of Restaurant: _____

1. When did your restaurant begin? Why?

2. What kind of food do you serve?

3. Who eats at your restaurant? *(check those that apply)*
 - expatriates/local palagi
 - Tourists
 - Samoans visiting from abroad
 - Samoans

4. Where do you get most of your food supply?
 - Imports
 - Local
 - Combination of imports/local

5. Do you grow any of your food supply? (circle)

Yes	No
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6. List foods from the following sources:
 - Local market:

 - Farmer/producer:

 - Wholesale:

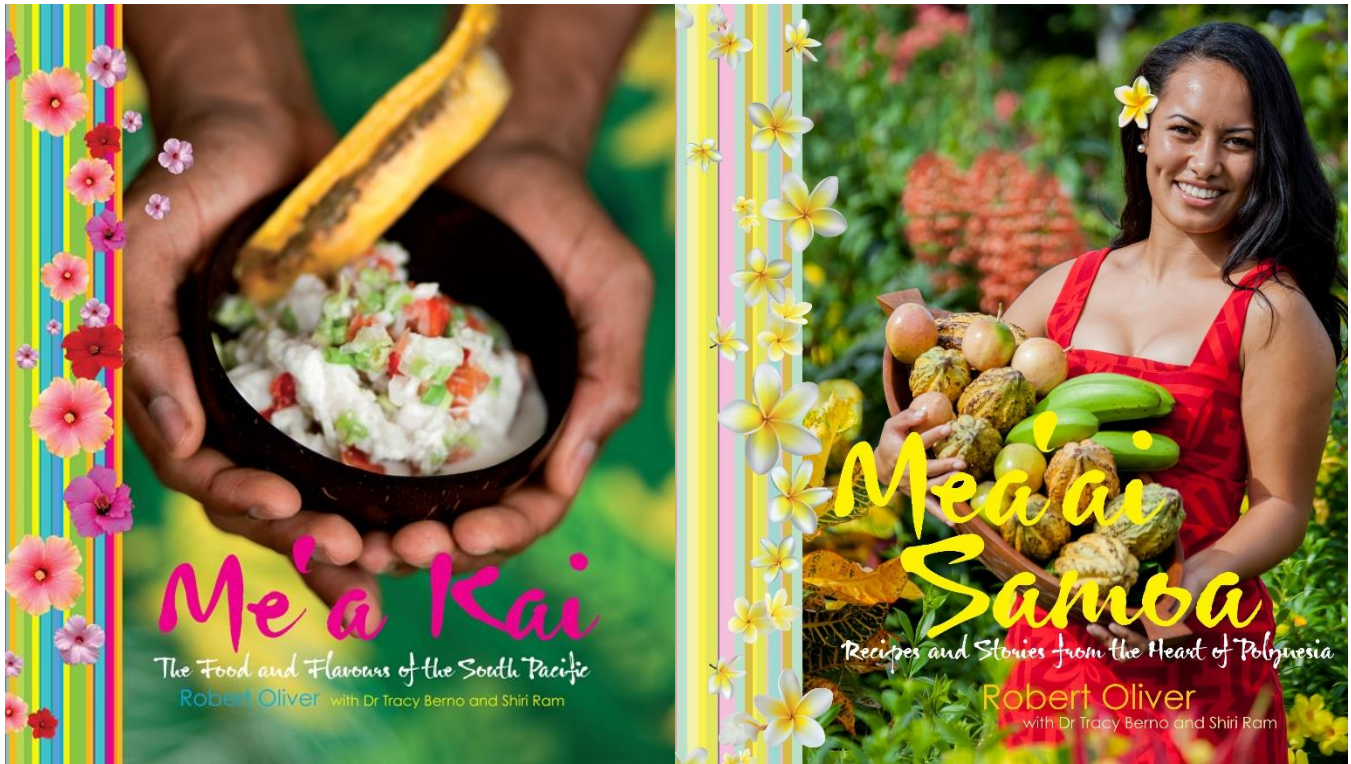
 - Own garden:

7. How does the use of local products impact your business?

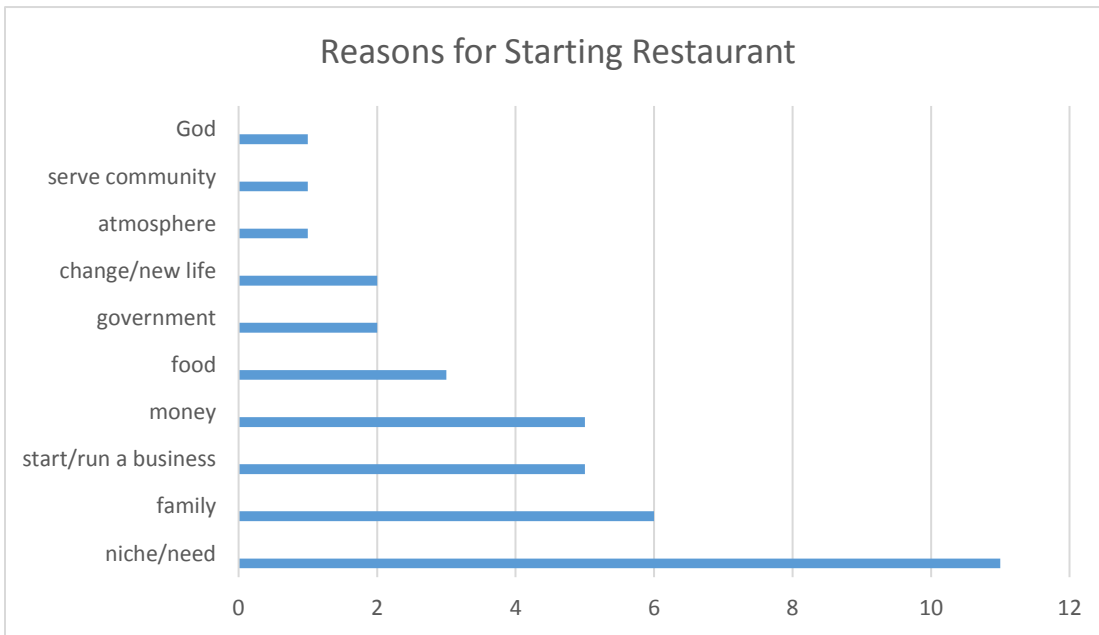
By signing this survey, I give permission for my responses to be used for research purposes.

Thank you!

B. *Me'a Kai* and *Mea'ai Samoa*, by Robert Oliver

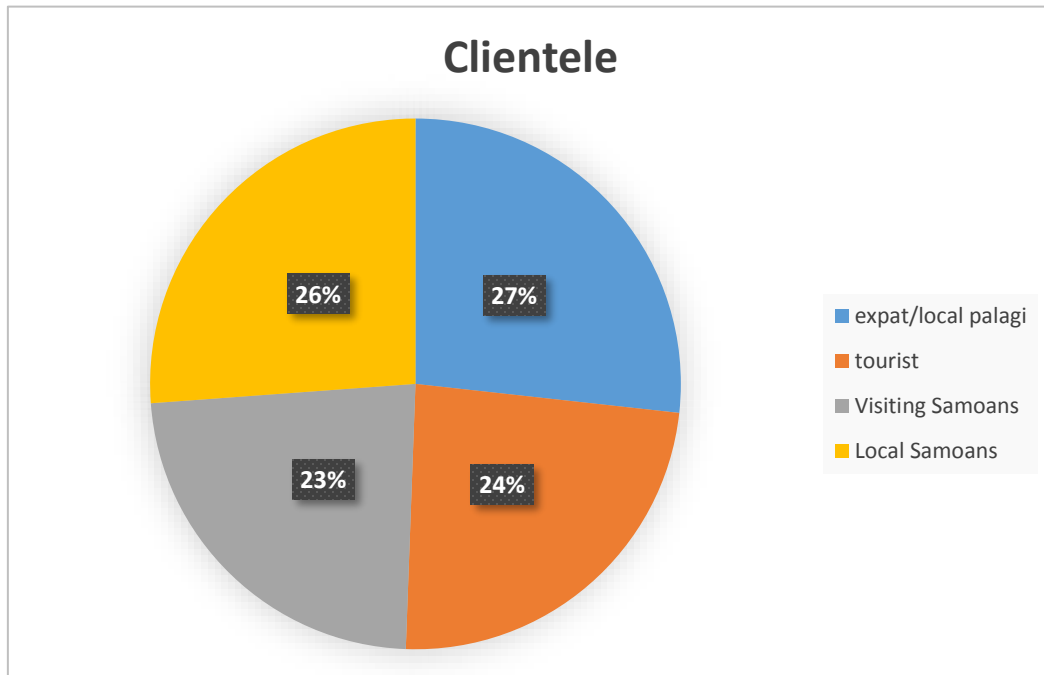


C. Survey results: reason for starting restaurant



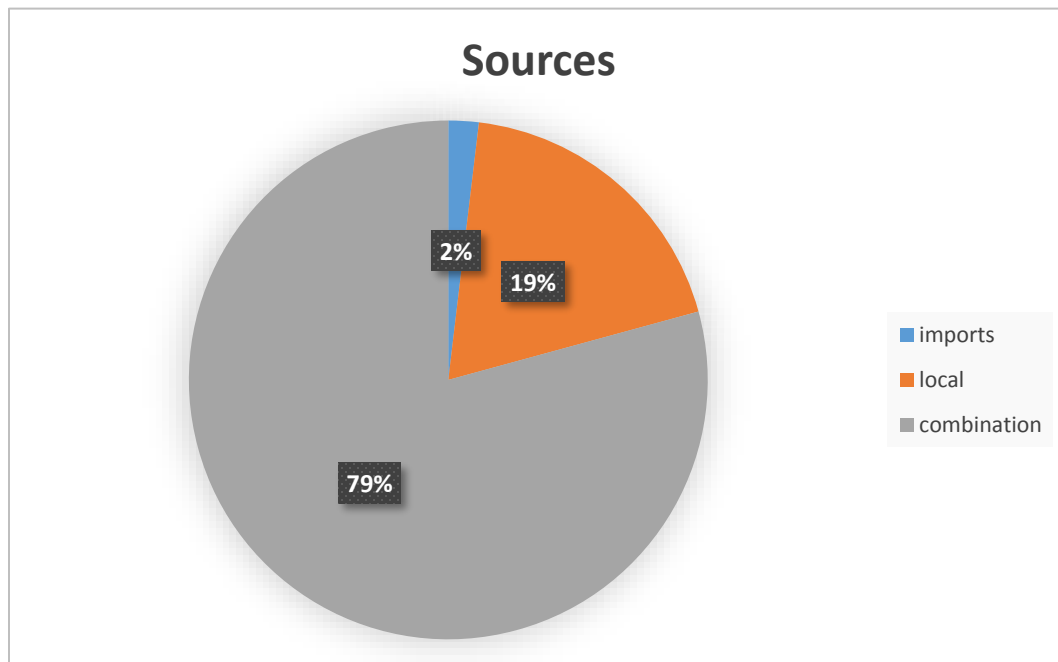
Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 28.

D. Survey Results: clientele



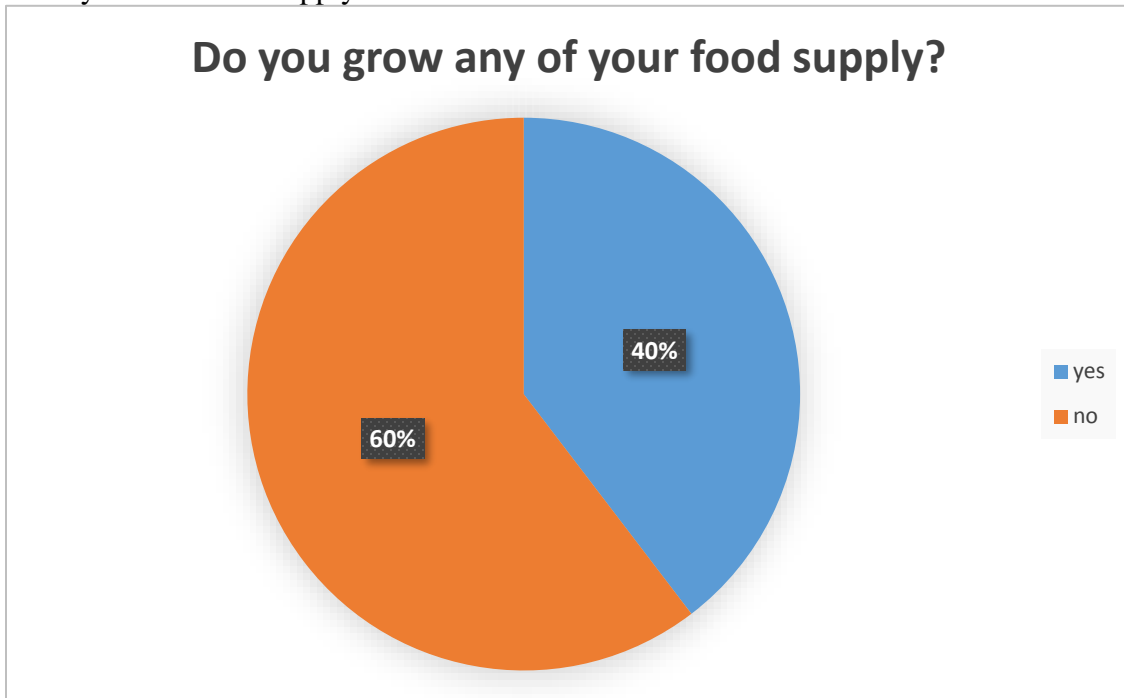
Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 29.

E. Survey Results: food sourcing



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 29.

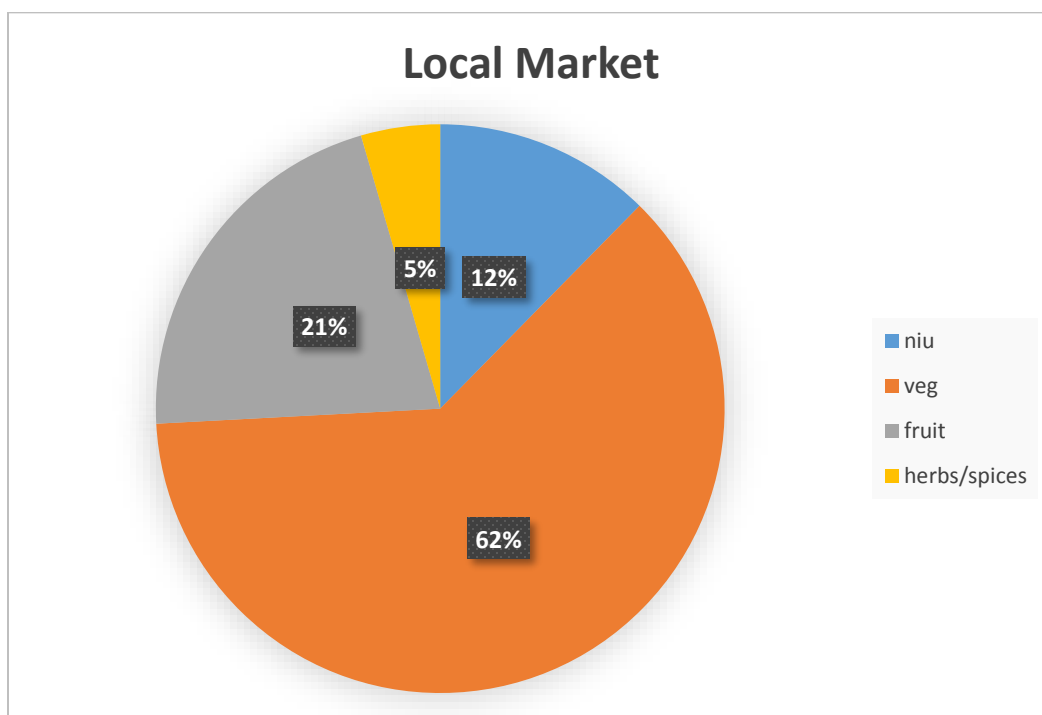
F. Survey results: food supply



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 30.

G. Survey Results: Foods from the local market

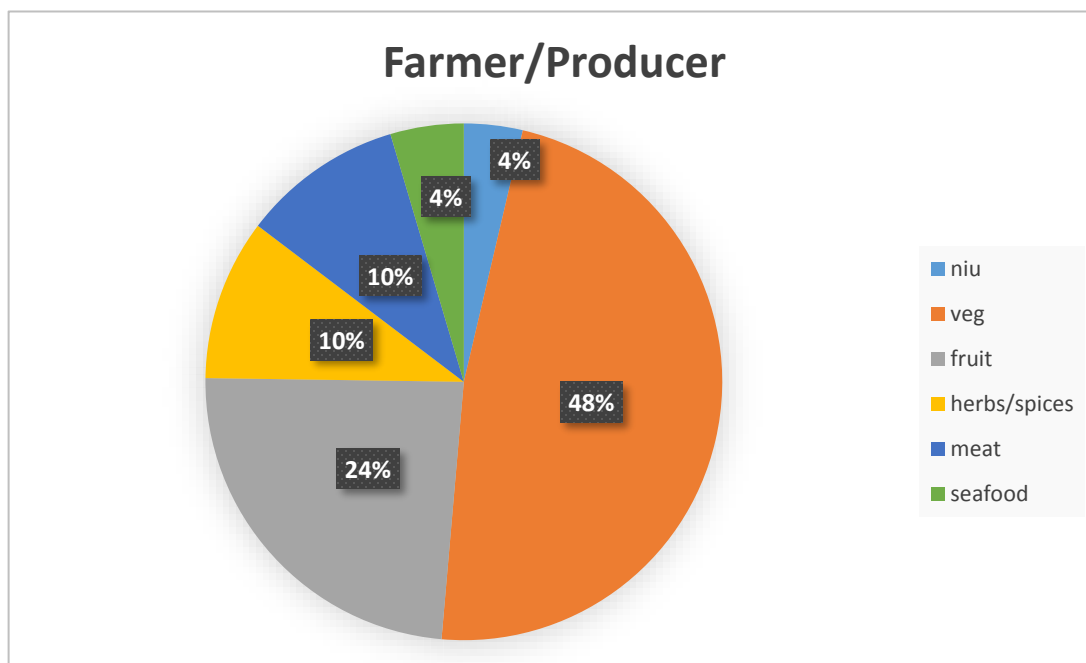
veg	13	lettuce	4	chin cabb	1
niu	11	fish	3	watercress	1
cucumber	7	onion	3	ginger	1
fruit	7	avocado	2	sasalapa	1
taro	5	esi	2	lemon	1
fa'i	5	herbs	2	lime	1
tom	5	cabbage	2	mango	1
pumpkin	5	spices	1	passionfruit	1
eggplant	5	pea	1	green bean	1



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 31.

H. Survey Results: Foods direct from farmer/producer

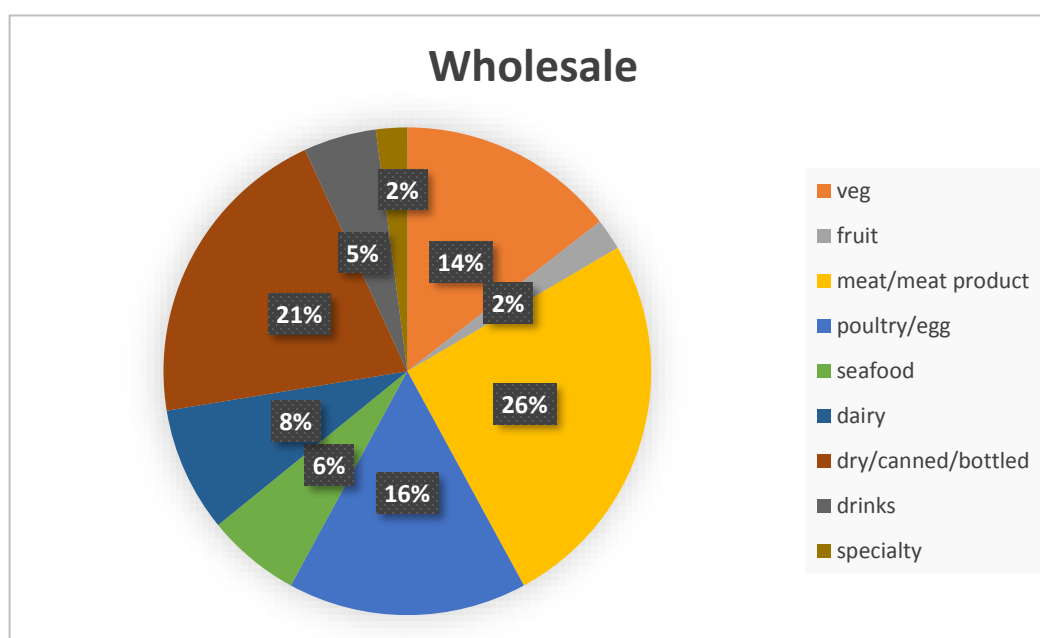
vegetable	14	mince	3	laupele	1
tomato	9	starfruit	3	green bean	1
lettuce	9	eggplant	3	green pepper	1
fa'i	8	lemon	3	mesclun	1
taro	6	beef	3	ginger	1
fruit	5	lime	2	chili	1
meat	5	herbs	2	coriander	1
esi	5	parsley	2	seafood	1
niu	4	basil	2	carrot	1
fish	4	spinach	2	round cabb	1
watercress	3				



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 32.

I. Survey Results: Foods purchased from wholesale stores

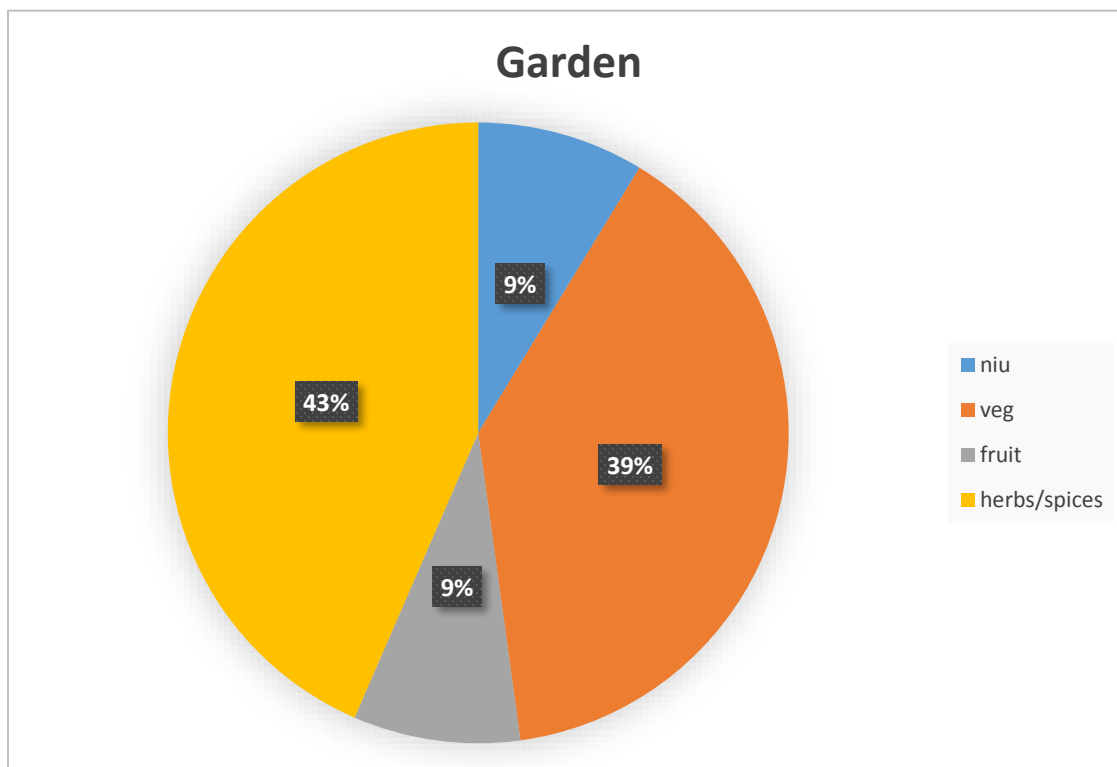
chicken	18	steak	3	noodles	2	Butter	1
meat	15	lettuce	3	cheese	2	Ketchup	1
milk	7	cabbage	2	coke	1	fish	1
rice	5	drinks	2	sprite	1	salt	1
sausage	5	flour	2	pork	1	syrup	1
eggs	5	onion	2	apple	1	berries	1
potato	4	ice cream	2	strawberries	1	b. beans	1
bacon	4	coffee	2	snacks	1	soda	1
sauce	4	carrot	2	flounder	1	eye fillet	1
fries	4	ham	2	pepperoni	1	wrap	1
mayo	4	can goods	2	tuna	1	shortening	1
dry goods	3	strip loin	2	chickpeas	1	tom sauce	1
veg	3	seafood	2	soy milk	1	green peas	1
momoe	3	prawns	2	whipping	1	crab meat	1
						salmon	1



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 33.

J. Survey Results: Foods grown in restaurant garden

herbs	6	niu	2
veg	4	eggplant	1
tom	4	laupele	1
parsley	3	spices	1
sp onions	2	sage	1
rosemary	2	chin cabb	1
basil	2	pea	1
pumpkin	2	cuke	1
lemon	2	lemongrass	1
mint	2	capsicum	1



Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 34.

K. Survey Results: How does the use of local products impact your business?

cheaper	23	good presentation	1
freshness	10	easy to cook	1
unstable supply	9	important	1
convenient	9	hard to find	1
useful/helpful	6	quality	1
customer satisfaction	4	stimulate local business	1
healthy	3	spoil easily	1
nice	2	authentic	1
taste	2	no GST	1
organic	2	stable	1
pricier	2	simple	1

Adapted from Gove, Emily. Local Flavors: a Look at Farm to Table in Samoa. SIT Digital Collections, 2016, 35

L. *Pua'a* and taro cooking on the umu



M. American *palagi* eating *toona'i*



N. Local *matai* receive guests at a *fa'alavelave*. This *fa'alavelave* is a funeral, and the *matai* sit outside of the house of the deceased, newly painted for the occasion. Beneath the tent is the grave where the body will later be placed. In front of them lie palm fronds, gifts from other *matai*, and later fine mats and canned goods will be exchanged.

