**Towards a Theory and Practice of Narrative Agriculture**

**Michelle Superle**

As part of my scholarly research into representations of agriculture in children’s literature and the efficacy of picture books to help children understand and engage with our food systems, I’m developing a new way to conceptualize the importance of stories about food and farming: narrative agriculture.

My concept of narrative agriculture is inspired by the principles and practices of narrative medicine, an approach that aims to help physicians understand their patients as whole human beings rather than a set of (disconnected) symptoms.

In the same spirit, I aim to help children and people from outside the agricultural sector understand—and empathize with—the farmers who feed us… their challenges, their persistence, their dedication, and their innovation. All this just so we can eat! I also strive to help people understand complexities of the food systems within which farmers do their jobs, not to mention the difficulties inherent within those systems.

Although much of my work on the Dig for Your Rights! project to date has been focused on children’s literature as a narrative and ideological vehicle, I’ve also been listening to farmers. Really, *really* listening—in addition to the Dig program, I also interact with farmers when I interview them for the Flood Stories project and *edible* magazine. Farmers have a lot to say. What they have to say is interesting and important. People are interested in what farmers have to say—the popularity of *edible* magazine is a testament to this. That’s why I believe developing and expanding my concept of narrative agriculture could result in improved public engagement with our food systems.

Narrative medicine has gained impressive traction over the past decade; that’s good, because it’s responsible for significantly improved patient care and outcomes. In other words, it works.

Will narrative agriculture be as effective? I believe so, considering the immense power and popularity of books, shows, and movies focused around what scholars call the “rural idyll”—the public’s imagined ideas about farms and farming (which tend to be *much* more enchanting than the realities).

We’ll find out when I start collecting data to test my theory.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy these stories about food and farming. Most of them will look and sound familiar—just the way you expect such stories to look and sound. A few, however, may surprise you: our “as-told-to” style stories.

For these stories, we’re partnered with the Climate Disaster Project (UVIC) and adapt their trauma-informed methodology by building on their interview questions about climate change to encompass food and farming. We then connect the individual stories to their corresponding human right(s) as laid out by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and/or Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contextualizes the personal experiences of our storytellers within a legal paradigm.

This empowering, cathartic approach results in deeply moving and deeply informative stories that are still quick and easy to read. We believe this healing process is crucial to re-envisioning a food security regional food system—collaboratively.

If you’ve got a story to share about food and/or farming, let us know! We’d love to hear it.