As director of the world-renowned Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) at UC Santa Cruz, Patricia Allen wears an extraordinary number of administrative hats. As one of the nation’s most prominent scholars on social aspects of food production, distribution, and access, she illuminates the changing food system as it affects and is shaped by conditions of labor, gender, and social inequality.
CASFS has dramatically broadened its mission since its origins in the campus garden that came to life in 1967 under the stewardship of pioneering horticulturist Alan Chadwick. The UC system’s first program to focus on sustainable food production and distribution, the 21st-century Center is (as its January 2008 self-study states) “dedicated to increasing ecological sustainability and social justice in the world’s food and agriculture system.” The Center’s accomplishments have been formally recognized on several recent occasions. In January 2007, the Ecological Farming Association presented its Steward of Sustainable Agriculture (“Sustie”) Award to the staff of the Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture; in October of that year, US Representative Sam Farr read a testimonial about CASFS into the Congressional Record.

As CASFS Director since July 2007 (after six months as Acting Director), Allen oversees some 35 employees; a 25-acre farm and 3-acre garden with a seasonal produce stand and community supported agriculture program; a full-time residential Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture that annually trains a diverse group of 35-40 organic farmers, gardeners, and educators; a wide range of research and service initiatives; prolific publications and events programs; educational offerings for undergraduate and graduate students as well as the general public, and ongoing fundraising efforts.

Allen’s many administrative responsibilities compete for her time with her research on food and social justice—a driving passion, as is clear in this oral history. Her publications include Together at the Table: Sustainability and Sustenance in the American Food System, published in 2004 by Pennsylvania State University Press, along with numerous articles and book chapters.

Sarah Rabkin interviewed Patricia Allen on two occasions, in Allen’s office at Oakes College on the UCSC campus. The interview conducted on December 4, 2008, emphasized Allen’s education and professional background and her work with CASFS. On May 21st, 2009, the primary focus was on her research and writing.
Additional Resources


**Brief #1:** *Community Supported Agriculture on the Central Coast: The CSA Member Experience*, by Jan Perez, Patricia Allen, and Martha Brown. Available online at [http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html](http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html)

**Brief #3:** *Alternative Food Initiatives in California: Local Efforts Address Systemic Issues*, by Patricia Allen, Margaret FitzSimmons, Michael Goodman, and Keith Warner. Available online at [http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html](http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html)

**Brief #9:** *Meeting Farm and Food Security Needs through Community Supported Agriculture and Farmers' Markets in California*, by Patricia Allen, Julie Guthman, and Amy Morris. Available online at [http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html](http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html)

**Brief #11:** *Farming the College Market: Results of a Consumer Study at UC Santa Cruz*, by Jan Perez and Patricia Allen. Available online at [http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html](http://casfs.ucsc.edu/publications/briefs/index.html)

Beginnings

**Rabkin:** This is Sarah Rabkin, and I’m with Patricia Allen at Oakes College at UCSC on December 4th, 2008. Patricia, I’m going to start with the same question I
ask everybody at the beginning of an interview: Where and when were you born?

**Allen:** I was born in San Jose, [California], June 19th, 1954, and I was an identical twin. The other one didn’t make it.

**Rabkin:** Oh. And where did you grow up?

**Allen:** I grew up also in San Jose. However, I spent most of my time, when I wasn’t in school, on my grandmother’s farm, which was in Fremont.

**Rabkin:** I was hoping you would tell me about this grandmother, who I understand inspired your interest in farming and social justice.

**Allen:** Yes, my grandmother was a single mother whose husband had died when her youngest child was six years old. She ran her own farm, which was very, very unusual at the time. She had a truck farm—vegetable crops, apricots and cherries. From a very early age, I remember seeing her work so, so very hard for so little, as huge farms were growing up around her. That inspired not only my interest in food and farming, but also justice, because it just seemed so unfair.

**Rabkin:** How much land did your grandmother have?

**Allen:** Less than twenty acres.
Rabkin: And most of that was in cultivation?

Allen: Yes, yes, it was all in cultivation.

Rabkin: Did you spend a lot of time at her place?

Allen: I did. I spent every school break with my grandmother, and then every summer. From the time of being eight years old, I had to work on the farm during the summer to pay for school clothes.

Rabkin: What kind of jobs did you do?

Allen: I did mostly cutting apricots for drying. She had a dry yard, and it was the most monotonous, boring thing you could ever imagine. The work was highly gendered, as you might imagine. It was women and girls who cut the apricots, and men and boys who picked the apricots and drove the tractor. So my interest in gender issues was also launched at a very early age, as the things that my brothers did, I was not allowed to do.

Rabkin: So you grew up with brothers who also worked on the farm.

Allen: Yes, I had two brothers at that time.

Rabkin: Did your grandmother have other employees working on the farm?
Allen: She did. Her oldest son worked with her on the farm. That’s how he earned his living once he was old enough to do that, and then farm workers were also hired to pick the fruit and so forth.

Rabkin: Were these migrant workers?

Allen: Yes. One of them lived in the area, and he worked year ’round. But then there would be migrant workers. And I also remember that— It’s hard to look back and try to understand. I don’t think that my grandmother and uncle were racist, but it was very obvious that labor was divided by race, not just by gender.

Rabkin: How so?

Allen: That the migrant workers were either Filipino or Mexican-American, and the people who owned the farm and drove the tractor were European-American.

Rabkin: Did your grandmother provide housing for the people she hired?

Allen: I know the one guy that was a year-’round worker lived in a house that she did provide. It was like a regular house, similar to what she lived in. As for the migrant workers, her farm was too small potatoes, so to speak. It was apricots and cherries and maybe some cucumbers. There wasn’t enough for year-round labor, and people lived—I actually have no idea where they lived.
Rabkin: Did you get to know the Mexican and Filipino workers?

Allen: I did a little bit. However, I have to say that there were also gender issues involved in that, including some very uncomfortable situations when I was a young teenager that I was scared to tell anyone about. That was difficult.

Rabkin: Wow.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: Tell me about your schooling.

Allen: Well, I went to thirteen years of Catholic school. When I was in kindergarten, I lived in a town called Red Bluff, which is north of here in Tehama County, and I went to Mercy Academy for years kindergarten through second grade, then moved to San Jose at that time and went to a Catholic elementary school, and then I went to a Catholic all-girls’ high school. I don’t know how I quite had the moxie to do this, in retrospect, but when I was a sophomore I observed that the all-boys’ Catholic school had a really different math and science curriculum. I said that I wanted to take these classes, too, and because the girls’ school didn’t offer them, I went to the boys’ school.

Rabkin: Were you the only girl at the boys’ school?
Allen: The first year I was. The second year there were a few more, and then it became integrated.

Rabkin: Did this experience contribute to your interest in gender issues?

Allen: [Laughs.] I think that the main thing that contributed to my interest in gender issues was just feeling like things weren’t fair, when I was very young, and then I didn’t really study gender issues or think that much about it as a high school student, frankly. It was just: This is unfair. I’m going to get the education that I would like to have. It wasn’t so much political at that time, or it didn’t feel political. But as I’ve learned more about the food system and learned more about feminism and gender politics, and particularly, frankly, as I have watched the gender discrimination in baseball (my daughter is a baseball pitcher), that has really expanded and sharpened my interest in gender issues.

Rabkin: Were you aware of the second wave of feminism that would have been cresting right around the time you were coming into high school?

Allen: No, actually, I wasn’t. And this is interesting. (I’ve never thought about this before.) I have never had the opportunity to play sports, for example, and I’m aware now that Title IX came in, but I had to work, and so I didn’t have time to play sports because I had to support myself. So it wasn’t possible to go to school and play sports and have a job. But I now know that things could have
been different. At the high school I went to, the boys’ high school, there were all kinds of courses. I remember taking this course on CIA involvement in Vietnam, and very contemporary, hard-hitting issues, but nothing on feminism, as you might imagine. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: Yes. It sounds like you had a really strong sense of injustice at an early age.

Allen: Yes. Yes, I did. And to some extent, I think that was because of life experience. And although I am a bit reticent to admit it, I think some of it came from going to Catholic school.

Rabkin: How so?

Allen: Because there was a lot of emphasis on thinking and a lot of emphasis on compassion and poverty issues, not in a really didactic, hit-you-over-the-head way, but we were always hearing, in a very missionary kind of way, I suppose—but you knew from a very early age that there was poverty in the world, that there was hunger in the world, and that that wasn’t necessary.

Rabkin: That’s really interesting. One of my other recent interviewees, Nesh Dhillon, who manages the Santa Cruz Farmers’ Markets, went to Jesuit high school, and he cited that as absolutely formative in what has become his career—
for very similar reasons, that he was introduced to a sense of values and justice early on.

**Allen:** Early on, and being supported for having ideas that weren’t necessarily the common discourse or the party line. I remember being in seventh grade and writing a paper about how, in fact, the Civil War had very little to do with freeing the slaves, that it was about economic issues, and thinking, that the teacher might not like the paper, but, oh, well. As it turned out, the teacher really supported that I took an alternative viewpoint and argued it. So it was the combination of being instilled with a sense of justice and compassion, along with permission to think and think *differently*. Since that time I had a number of other school experiences in taking risks with alternative points of view and was never sanctioned for doing so. And as I mentioned, taking a course at the high school about CIA involvement in Vietnam—I mean, this was in the height of the Vietnam War, and these were people that were not toeing the party line. I learned that challenging conventional wisdom was a necessary step to a better world.

**Studying Political Economy at UC Berkeley**

**Rabkin:** How did you make the decision to go to UC Berkeley?
Allen: Oh. I don’t know. It just seemed like the place to go. I honestly don’t know! [laughs] None of my siblings, father, or grandparents went to college, although my mother had gone to San Jose State. And when I was applying to college, my parents didn’t even know I was doing it. It wasn’t one of these, “Well, let’s take her around to all the different campuses and see.” They didn’t even know I applied to college, and then when I got admitted, they were, like, “Oh!” [Chuckles.]

But at Berkeley, the education was absolutely phenomenal. I was able to take classes like advanced calculus, economics, and statistics from people who were world renowned, and then take classes in political economy from people who were the premier people in the field. It was a wonderful experience.

Rabkin: How did you decide on political economy as a major?

Allen: It just seemed by that point that I wanted to drill down, as they say now in the business world, to what the real core issues were, and that’s what I came up with as the things that were the most determinate, intersecting of course with race and gender. But it seemed like class issues and the motor of the economic system were what was determining the way in which the world worked.

Rabkin: Are there particular mentors or classes that you remember as influential from your undergraduate days?
Allen: I remember taking math and science classes and loving them, because they involved formulas and “right” answers. And then taking classes from Alain de Janvry in—then it was called the Agricultural Economics Department, as being primarily influential, as someone who really was able to lay things out in a very clear, succinct way that there were just so many *aha!* moments per class.

Rabkin: What were the subjects in those classes?

Allen: That was on the political economy of agricultural development, with a global focus. That was, I think, the key class for me.

**International Travel**

Rabkin: And did you go straight from Berkeley to Davis for graduate study?

Allen: No, I graduated from UC Berkeley with honors, but because I didn’t come from an educated, professional, or connected family, and women weren’t very encouraged to pursue careers, I didn’t know what to do. The best job I could get was a job working for minimum wage in a fabric store. So I saved my money from working at that job and decided to travel around the world. It was in that era when people would do things like that. [Chuckles.] And that’s what I did. And then, while I was traveling, thought, well, there’s so much going on in the
world; what I really need to do is go to graduate school and learn how I can make more of a contribution.

So I went to Cal Poly [California Polytechnic State University], and that was clearly not for me. After I had just been in all these classes at UC Berkeley, going to Cal Poly for graduate school wasn’t a good fit. So then I applied to UC Davis, and studied international agriculture at UC Davis, because at that time I thought that I would go overseas and do international agricultural development. As it happened, that’s not how it went.

**Rabkin:** What year was it that you were traveling before you went to Cal Poly?

**Allen:** I want to say 1979. I remember being in Afghanistan after the Russian occupation. I was there during the Russian invasion. I think that was ’79.

**Rabkin:** Was that hairy?

**Allen:** It was interesting. In some ways it was scary because we weren’t really able to move about. I was just stuck. But it was also really interesting in a sense of remembering seeing soldiers standing around with these AK-47s, with rosebuds in the barrel. I wasn’t able to speak to anybody to find out the significance or anything, but I just remember this image of feeling like these people really didn’t want to be violent.
Rabkin: Wow.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: I associate that image with growing up in Berkeley during the whole Cambodia protest and People’s Park protest. [Then-Gov. Ronald] Reagan ordered the National Guard in, and they were lined up with their guns, and some of the student protesters put daisies in the guns.

Allen: Ohhhhh!

Rabkin: It’s a potent image, but it’s a different context here.

Allen: Yes. And so I don’t know if the soldiers added the roses themselves or somebody came along and did it, but I do remember that very, very clearly.

Rabkin: Do you have any other vivid, particularly strong memories from your travels?

Allen: I was in Kenya at one point and then traveled overland to Sudan and then Egypt, and [I remember] being warned about these horrible sexist countries. I traveled third class from Nairobi to Wadi Halfa in Sudan, and just feeling like I had rarely been so accepted in my life as by the other people on the train. People shared whatever they had. When I continued to travel in Sudan and stayed in
Khartoum for a bit, I learned quickly to never admire anything because they would give it to you. No matter how little people had—and, you know, I’ve read about this since, but at the time, I was just figuring it out for myself. It was awkward to not compliment people because they would give you something they couldn’t afford to give you. And yet there was so much to compliment!

I remember one time—I was really in the outback of Sudan, traveling by desert bus with those who lived there, and the bus stopped at an outpost for a break. I sat down to have tea next to a Rashaida man in full nomadic regalia complete with sword on his belt, you know—someone that I suppose you’re supposed to be scared of, and not being able to communicate in any way, but just smiling at each other in a way that was—no, we’re just people; we’re here together. I remember that moment as one of those most amazing human communication experiences that spans time, ethnicity, gender, politics. Just basic humanity.

**Rabkin:** It sounds like that year of traveling offered, whatever else it provided, a profound sense of the possibility of trusting in other people, even people quite different from you, and a reminder of people’s generosity.

**Allen:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**Rabkin:** Do you feel that affects you in your work now?
Allen: It does. Of generosity, of possibility, and of also not stereotyping and categorizing people.

One other experience that was much less happy that I had was crossing into Israel from Jordan on a bus (this was all very low-budget travel), and the way in which the Arab people on the bus were treated by the Israeli soldiers. I have rarely been so outraged and powerless at the same time. That really stuck with me. And that I was partly responsible for it by virtue of being American.

Rabkin: You said that when you returned, you tried Cal Poly.

Allen: I had this astonishing education at Berkeley, and Cal Poly was in a very, very different spot in the understanding and the conceptualizing of what development issues were.

Rabkin: In terms of critical thinking about the status quo?

Allen: Yes.

UC Davis International Development Program

and the Small Farm Center

Rabkin: So we left you going on to UC Davis, after leaving Cal Poly. And tell me about the work you did at Davis.
Allen: Well, at Davis I was in the international development program. I’ve never had the luxury of just going to school. I also had to work. So I became a research assistant in the Small Farm Program at UC Davis, and then eventually that became a regular staff job while I was still in graduate school.

Rabkin: So you were working at the Small Farm Center and completing your master’s concurrently?

Allen: Yes. And it was off to a rocky start because my partner’s brother had just been killed by the police. We had the moving truck all packed up, and the phone had been disconnected and everything. We were still in San Luis Obispo and the police come to the door and say, “You have to call your mother.” So my first three weeks of graduate school were going down to the Bay Area, to the hospital every day until he died. It wasn’t a great start.

Rabkin: Wow.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: Tell me more about your work with the Small Farm Center.

Allen: That was funded through what I think was the CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] project, which was federal funding to provide
support for—I don’t really know, because I wasn’t in the management part of it—but the impression I had was to provide funds for economic development for low-income people. The way that UC Davis was using that—actually systemwide—was to hire small farm advisers to work with small-scale, primarily Latino growers. And so that was the main thing that the Small Farm Center did. There were cooperative extension specialists and then there was me.

Rabkin: And what was your role?

Allen: As a graduate research assistant, my role was to organize programs and collect information, to put out research briefs and things like that. Eventually, a regular staff position was created, for which I applied. But I remember in the job interview, I was asked why a woman would want to have a job outside the home. You know, he really didn’t understand why women wanted to work. Somehow, I got the job anyway.

Rabkin: What year was this?

Allen: This would have been 1981, probably. And I thought that question was really, really strange, but I didn’t really have a category or a context for the level of outrage that I now feel in repeating that story.
Rabkin: Do you have particularly strong memories of any of the people or projects that you worked with at the Small Farm Center?

Allen: I remember organizing the first Small Farm Conference. That has become an annual conference.

Rabkin: This is statewide.

Allen: Yes. It felt very, very exciting to work with other people to do something that hadn’t been done before, that was helping people that had been kind of outside the range of who the University of California really worked with.

Rabkin: What kinds of presenters and topics were involved in that first Small Farm Conference?

Allen: Gosh, I would have to look back. It was mostly production-oriented topics for small farmers and also topics on direct marketing. But it was very instrumental-focused: here’s how you can do a better job of farming Crop X, and here’s how you can do a better job of marketing Crop Y. It wasn’t issue-oriented.

Rabkin: How much emphasis was there on what we now call sustainable farming and organic agriculture?
Allen: Really none. And when I came to UC Santa Cruz in 1984, I wanted to stay involved with that conference, and at that time said, “Okay, we have small farm, we have direct marketing. I want a third emphasis on sustainability,” and having that be the subject of intense debate about whether or not that was a good idea.

Rabkin: Intense debate among whom?

Allen: Among the board of directors, I guess you would call it, of the conference, the conference organizing committee, the representatives of the other organizations.

Rabkin: Wow. That recently.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Allen: Yes. A lot has changed. I remember working with Karen Klonsky (she’s still at UC Davis) on the first Small Farm Conference, and Steve Mendivil, who was a farm adviser at that time. (He died several years ago.) But it did. It just felt like: This is great, working with other people to do something that’s important and good.

Rabkin: Who did you do your master’s work with, or was that significant?
Allen: Dave Hansen. He was in agricultural economics. This was an interdisciplinary degree program in international agricultural development, and that was really challenging because, as interdepartmental degree programs go—to find faculty who are willing to work with you when it’s not their regular job was a challenge. He put in the time. He worked with me. He was great. And I also remember a visiting professor, an Israeli, Dov Weintraub, who taught incredible classes and had different ways of thinking about things than I had been exposed to before that.

Rabkin: For example?

Allen: Just a very international focus, someone who wasn’t from the United States talking about, you know, “those people over there.” He had worked in so many other countries, and brought perspective from other cultures and other ways of looking at economics and societal arrangements. That was wonderful.

And then also Alex McCalla, who at that time was also in agricultural economics and he was the dean of the College of Agriculture and Resource Economics. He was someone who had talked about the University of California being beholden to private companies and using public dollars to support what was basically private research. That was one of those *aha* moments. That someone who was so highly regarded, an internationally renowned scholar, would say something like that, was—it was like one of those Catholic school moments: This is okay, yes, to
call it out. You know how it is when it’s something you haven’t thought about before, and then you hear it, and you’re, like: Of course!

**Rabkin:** A light goes on.

**Allen:** Yes, exactly.

**Rabkin:** What was the focus of your master’s thesis work?

**Allen:** It was a project to learn about the research and education needs of small-scale growers in California. At the Small Farm Center we had this presumption of what people wanted to know, but no one had actually *asked* them. And so that’s what I did; it was a statewide survey of small-scale growers to find out what they really needed from the University of California in terms of research and education.

**Rabkin:** How did you find the growers that you surveyed? How did you develop your list?

**Allen:** I remember going to the library and looking at maps, these huge maps, and getting addresses. It was very, very labor intensive. It was back when everything was handwritten. Now it probably doesn’t seem like much. [Laughs.]

**Rabkin:** Those were different times, without a computer.
Allen: Those were very, very different times. And I remember wondering if people would respond because I was female, and I remember someone in the Ag Econ Department, who had done a different survey, posted a response. Written across it: “I don’t deal with women farm advisers,” something like that. This would have been in the eighties. I remember thinking—

Rabkin: How would people have known that you were female if you were just sending out a written survey?

Allen: My name on the cover letter.

Rabkin: Wow. Do you feel like that has changed much in the state since then?

Allen: I don’t know, because I don’t travel in those worlds anymore. I suspect it has changed to a large extent, at least institutionally. I remember one time going through the cooperative extension directory at UC Davis, and seeing that one hundred percent of the support staff were women, and one hundred percent of the specialists and farm advisers, except for in home economics, were men. That has changed significantly, on the face of it. What women encounter out in the field, I don’t know. But I am currently doing a research project on gender and labor with Carolyn Sachs at Penn State University, and we are interested in gender and the scientific enterprises.
Rabkin: Now.

Allen: Yes. So hopefully I’ll find out.

Rabkin: Great. I’ll forward to talking about that more when we talk about your research. You mentioned that you had initially envisioned, when you went into this program at Davis, that you were going to go abroad and do international work, and you said that ended up not happening. Tell me about the unexpected turn you made that kept you in the United States.

Allen: It was more realizing, through my education in this program, that so much of what was going on was the United States developing ideas and programs and then exporting them and saying, “Be like us.” It was also clear that “being like us” wasn’t such a good thing. At that point, I decided that rather than being part of the machine exporting things to other countries, that I would be better off spending my time trying to solve problems here. That was a better emphasis and focus for my time on Earth.

Rabkin: Interesting. You’re not the first person who has told that story.

Allen: Ahhh.
**Rabkin:** Going into a program thinking they were going to do international agricultural advising and so forth, and ending up reaching that conclusion that what needed transforming was the system at home.

**Allen:** Exactly.

**Rabkin:** Yes. Before we move on from the Small Farm Center or UC Davis, do you want to say anything else about that experience?

**Allen:** I also remember that having the opportunity to take classes that weren’t just agricultural economics or social science programs, but taking vegetable crops—I really enjoyed the constellation of expertise that existed at UC Davis. I learned a lot. I also remember participating in the early days of the student farm and things like that. It felt like something was being created that was going to be different than how it had been.

**Rabkin:** Did you get some practical farming experience there, picking up from what you’d learned on your grandmother’s farm?

**Allen:** I vaguely remember taking a class that was supposed to be practical, and thinking that all I did was move irrigation pipe. So—not really.
**Rabkin:** How was it for you, working with, advising, being a resource for farmers when you, yourself, were not a farmer?

**Allen:** Well, I didn’t go out and talk with the farmers. I was never a farm adviser. Those were all men. I would just create information that then the advisers could use.

**Rabkin:** I see. Did you feel at all wistful about that role separation, or were you happy in the role that you were in?

**Allen:** Because I was also in graduate school, there was no way I could really travel, and so it just seemed appropriate. I mean, I was aware of the gender divisions of labor. But I couldn’t have been a farm adviser, even if I had wanted to, because I had other things I was up to.

**Rabkin:** Did you come from UC Davis to [UC] Santa Cruz?

**Outreach Coordinator for UC Santa Cruz’s Agroecology Program**

**Allen:** I did. And it was a temporary job for which I applied at that time. So it was a huge risk, because I had a regular staff position at UC Davis, but I felt that at that time, the environment at UC Davis was much more constraining of ideas and possibility than UC Santa Cruz was. I remember feeling like coming to UC
Santa Cruz was like walking into the light or something, that thinking was allowed. It just felt very much more comfortable to me. I was very much embedded in the traditional agricultural extension, agricultural experiment station, almost always the only woman at any meeting I went to, always having different things that I was thinking about and talking about than every other person. I felt that coming to Santa Cruz, not only was what was then called the Agroecology Program different than what was going on at UC Davis, but the campus as a whole just felt much more open.

**Rabkin:** Can you remember any specific ways that UC Santa Cruz looked or felt or smelled or seemed different?

**Allen:** It’s much less tangible and specific than that.

**Rabkin:** It was general impressions, an overall feeling of the place?

**Allen:** Yes. I’m going to have to think that through, because I should be able to articulate it. But it was just very, very clear that a person could talk about sustainability. As I mentioned, just raising that as a topic that could be part of the Small Farm Conference was very controversial, whereas at Santa Cruz it was kind of assumed that that’s what we were up to.
Rabkin: You also actually specifically mentioned the gender thing when you came to Santa Cruz, that that was something that felt different. Were there women in leadership positions here?

Allen: Yes, at that time. In fact, the person who I communicated with about the job was Kay Thornley. She was clearly running many aspects of the Agroecology Program, and that felt very (thank you for calling that out) different than my experience at UC Davis, where the women that I knew, with the exception of Karen Klonsky who was an ag economist specialist, were in support roles.

Rabkin: And what was the position that you came for in the Agroecology Program?

Allen: The position that I applied for was called outreach coordinator. And that, after a little while of being here, felt not quite right to me.

Rabkin: The idea was that you were supposed to be sort of educating the agricultural community about what was going on in the Agroecology Program?

Allen: Right, and not just the farming community, but the community at large. I wanted more of a partnership model of figuring out how to transform the food system together. And then, through the process of being outreach coordinator, again, as seems to be my wont, I would identify things that were being unsaid,
that were silences, that people weren’t focusing on as we were talking about transforming the food system. It was very focused on environment. People and social justice were kind of left out of the equation. So after being here for several years, I wanted to learn more about social theory. At that time, I was trying to decide, well, should I quit my job and go to graduate school? And then ultimately came up with the idea of doing what I had always done.

**Rabkin:** Working and going to school at the same time.

**Allen:** Exactly, yes.

**Rabkin:** When did you first arrive at UCSC?

**Allen:** In 1984. I think February of 1984. I remember, I was still finishing my master’s thesis. I was in this apartment, and I had no furniture. I remember sitting on an ice box with a pile of paper, writing my master’s thesis.

**Rabkin:** You had already come to Santa Cruz and you were finishing up your master’s thesis here.

**Allen:** On my own time. It was just the finishing touches.

**Rabkin:** Right, right.
Allen: But I remember it was a bleak time, and not having anywhere to live at first and living in my car and—yes, it was a challenging time.

Rabkin: Wow. So about five years later, you began a Ph.D. program here?

Allen: Right, yes.

Rabkin: In sociology?

Allen: Yes.

Doctoral Student in UC Santa Cruz’s Sociology Department

Rabkin: Tell me about that.

Allen: That was a revelation to me. It felt like I was taking the classes that were the next level of classes after the classes I had taken at UC Berkeley. The faculty were amazing! I mean, talk about having scales drop from your eyes. Paul Lubeck and Jim O’Connor and Andy Szasz, in particular, were unbelievably excellent teachers, and were able to connect theory with actual problems, able to engage people in discussions about how the world worked. And then also research methods. It was an amazing education. I would go around to conferences, professional conferences, and run into graduate students at other
universities and just feeling so fortunate to be among the cutting-edge thinkers at UC Santa Cruz. I feel very fortunate, because just having a doctorate degree doesn’t mean that much, but getting the kind of education that these people were providing was really significant. It changed my life.

Yes. There was something else I was going to say. Oh, that I have a five-year B.S., an M.S. and a Ph.D., and in all that time, only two of my courses were taught by women faculty.

**Rabkin:** Wow. And which institutions were they at?

**Allen:** One was at UC Davis. It was a statistics class. And at UC Santa Cruz I took a class from Dana Takagi that was also a statistics class. I never thought about that, that both of the woman-taught courses on my transcript were statistics—

**Rabkin:** Interesting.

**Allen:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of insights or revelations did you develop in the course of that Ph.D. work that might be examples of scales falling from your eyes?
Allen: So many. But one of them is kind of a personal nature. I always felt like kind of an outlier. I remember being in school at Berkeley, and other people would go party or something, and I always had to go to work. I wasn’t able to participate in social activities or social change activities. I always had to go to work. And I always felt like it was me, that there was something wrong with me. It was being in the sociology program at UC Santa Cruz that I understood that, oh, no, I’m situated in a social context not of my choosing. So that was really significant for me.

And then just learning more about how social structures work, and discourse and ideologies, and capitalism—things that you figure there’s something going on there, but being in these courses and having things explained was—I mean, I can’t think of another way to say it—just so many aha moments. I started out being very interested, obviously, in sustainable agriculture and environmental issues and in social issues, but I didn’t really understand what those were in any detail or depth. So it was through being in those programs that I really got to understand gender issues and class issues and racism in a deep way.

While I didn’t take any classes on the food system (because there weren’t any at that time), I was able to apply what I was learning, in very general terms, to what was going on in the food system. As a result, some of the stuff I’ve written and studied has been the only work of its kind. And that’s the direct result of being in the sociology program here.
Rabkin: In terms of synthesizing understandings about gender and class and race with understandings about how the food system works.

Allen: Yes, yes, and that there’re these intersections.

Rabkin: Yes.

Allen: And that it’s structure; it’s not somebody being mean or heartless. [Chuckles.]

Rabkin: Yes. In addition to the professors you mentioned, were there particular authors or readings that opened your eyes, or that have been really influential for you?

Allen: David Harvey. He’s a geographer at Johns Hopkins. His work has been absolutely central to the work that I’ve gone on to do. Carolyn Sachs at Penn State, who studies gender and agriculture. I also want to mention Bill Friedland. He was absolutely—I never took classes from Bill, but being around Bill and talking with Bill, and knowing what he was about, and his verve, was very significant. Margaret FitzSimmons, who has more knowledge and ideas per second than just about anyone I’ve met. Fred Buttel is somebody that was absolutely central. He was an environmental sociologist at University of Wisconsin, Madison. His work was very, very central to my graduate studies.
Let’s see, who—what other authors? Too many to name, but many classic and contemporary theorists and chroniclers of social issues.

**Rabkin:** All the while that you were doing this Ph.D. work, you were continuing to work for the Agroecology Program.

**Allen:** Correct.

**Rabkin:** Were there resonances for you between the academic work you were doing and the work you did for Agroecology?

**Allen:** Oh, yes. I don’t know if it’s quite resonance, but being in the graduate program absolutely shaped what I decided to do in my work.

**Rabkin:** Tell me about that.

**Allen:** So, for example, I organized a conference on sustainability. The first conference I organized on sustainability was in 1985. That was before I went into graduate school. It was on your fairly typical topics: production and market-oriented kinds of topics. And even at that time, that was extremely controversial. And after I’d been in graduate school and I organized another conference. It was much more on core issues of sustainability and about epistemology.
Kellogg’s Integrated Farming Systems Project

And so I saw things through a completely different lens. Then when I was involved in this Kellogg project, the California Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture—everyone else that was involved in the project was, again, focused on production and marketing. And because of what I had learned about in graduate school, I really wanted it to be focused much more broadly on issues that also included food access and hunger and labor. That was always a struggle. It absolutely influenced what I thought were the issues with which we should be dealing at the Center.

Rabkin: What was the nature of this Kellogg program?

Allen: The [W. K.] Kellogg Foundation started something called the Integrated Farming Systems project. There was a call for proposals, and I remember submitting one with a colleague, Carolyn Sachs, focused on gender and agriculture. They were not interested at all in that. And then working with Steve Gliessman and submitting something that was integrated farming systems, agroecology, and then a number of other organizations in California had also submitted proposals, and so what the Kellogg Foundation said was, well, we like these projects. You guys work together, and we’ll fund a collaborative, but we’re not going to fund any of you individually.
And so that ended up including UC Davis, what became ALBA, the Agriculture & Land-Based [Training Association]—it wasn’t called that at that time; and a few other organizations. We had to do a project together. And what that project actually was—I remember I was always butting heads with people because I wanted it to be focusing on more critical issues than other people wanted to focus on.

**Rabkin:** Did you have that butting-heads experience within the Agroecology Program as well, coming in to a group of people who, as you said, had been somewhat more focused on the natural science end of things?

**Allen:** No. I remember feeling like—people were doing what they were trained to do and what their expertise was in, but that didn’t mean that they thought that was the only thing in the world. They encouraged me to focus on social issues.

**Organizing the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements Sixth Annual Conference at UCSC in 1986**

**Rabkin:** I’m going to back us up a little bit here, because, as I understand it, you and Steve Gliessman convened the sixth annual scientific meeting of IFOAM.

**Allen:** Yes. [slaps hand to forehead]
Rabkin: You have your head in your hand! And that was here at UCSC in 1986.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: And IFOAM is the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. How did that come about?

Allen: Well, it was Steve who brought it to UCSC—he was a member of the organization, and he, I imagine, put in a proposal to have the conference here, and then I was the person who organized the conference.

Rabkin: The person.

Allen: Well, working with my assistant, Debra van Dusen and with Steve. At the time, we worked together. And so we were responsible, basically, for putting out a call for papers, organizing the program, organizing a farm tour, where—it was a week-long farm tour that we went around to all these different places. You know, fifty people from all different countries not having a common language, going to all these different farms on a bus. Yes, that was a project.

So we organized that conference. It went off very, very well. And then we put together proceedings from that. But, again, it was very—I mean, in retrospect, very narrowly defined. The proceedings very much focused on technical topics.
**Rabkin:** Do you think that that conference contributed to the emergence of any new thinking or new paradigms or new developments in sustainable agriculture, internationally or closer to home?

**Allen:** Perhaps, but none that I’m aware of. It may have really changed what somebody in Norway or somebody in Mali thought, but I don’t know about that.

**Rabkin:** Did you end up developing any new relationships with international colleagues as a result of planning that conference?

**Allen:** Not really, because I was more the conference organizer. I was the “staff person.” I wasn’t a “presenter” or a “scholar.”

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**The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems**

**Rabkin:** So you were here working on your Ph.D., finishing your dissertation and working for the Agroecology Program, which at some point became the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, and then at some point you became the director. Tell me about those transitions.

**Allen:** Okay. So when I first came, I was, as I mentioned, the outreach coordinator. And then, because of my work, because of the insights I gained being in graduate school, I changed a lot of what I was doing in my work, the
content of it. And, as I mentioned, even though other people in the program weren’t doing that, they supported my doing it. Then there was an external review, and the external review said, among other things, this social science research—there’s nothing else going on like it in the country, and this really needs to be supported, and this person needs to be in an academic position. So a new position was created to support the kind of work that I was doing in a staff position.

So at that point, there was a reorganization, and I became associate director, with the responsibility for the social science research program. Then I became interim director in January 2007 so Carol Shennan, the director, could take a sabbatical. Carol came from UC Davis, and I don’t know if you’ve interviewed her, but she was a woman on the vegetable crops department at UC Davis, so if you want to talk gender, she would have lots of insight.

So Carol wanted to go on sabbatical, and was going to be unable to go on sabbatical if someone didn’t take the director role for a little while. I didn’t want to do it particularly, but because Carol otherwise wouldn’t have been able to take her sabbatical, I said, “Okay, I’ll do it,” with the understanding that it was an interim situation. Then the dean asked if I would stay on as director, and I said okay.

Rabkin: Reluctantly?
Allen: Yes, reluctantly, because I saw that it would really preempt the kind of research and writing that I wanted to do, and I also felt was important that somebody be doing it. So yes, reluctantly. But here I am.

Rabkin: So you now have administrative responsibilities that compete for your time with the kinds of research and writing that you also do.

Allen: Absolutely.

Rabkin: I don’t imagine there is such a thing as a typical week in the life of Patricia Allen, the CASFS director, but maybe you could walk me through a representative week, just to give a sense of what kinds of responsibilities you have.

Allen: [sighs] Well, you’re right: there is no typical week, and the job is very complex because we have a staff of over thirty people, a budget of something like two million dollars, most of which is not regular funds, so it’s either self-generated income or we have to fundraise through writing grant proposals or getting donations, and we also manage facilities, and we have a residential program. So, as you might imagine, all of these things put huge demands on time. It’s both a complex and complicated organization, with lots of history and lots of potential. We need to adjust with the times and continue to contribute to making the food system better. A lot of what we were able to do in the seventies
was okay then but is no longer okay in the 2000s. For example, living in tents is no longer going to be allowed, and so that is a **huge** project, to figure out what are we going to do.

**Rabkin:** No longer allowable because of liability concerns, public image concerns on the part of the university?

**Allen:** I’m not clear on all of the reasons, but one of which is that there’s a camping ban on campus, and I’m sure there are health and safety concerns as well. So there are endless things that come up as a result of having a residential program and managing twenty-eight acres of campus facilities, having little to do with a research program or an academic education program.

In a typical week, (and this is something that I’m committed to changing because I’m just now coming off of being very, very sick due to stress), I work seven days a week. I get up. First thing in the morning, I check my e-mail, which you’re not supposed to do.

**Rabkin:** What do you mean, you’re not supposed to do?

**Allen:** Oh, time management books say, “Don’t check your e-mail till you’ve done what you really want to set out to do that day.”
Rabkin: I see, because it can distract you in a million directions.

Allen: And that’s how it goes. That’s how it goes. It will be four o’clock in the afternoon and I’ve been working nonstop since 5 a.m. and I’m like, “but I haven’t done anything tangible.” I’m sure this happens to you. Dealing with almost endless administrative things, which will calm down now that there’s an assistant director, and writing articles kind of on the fly, being asked to give keynote talks and figuring out what I’m going to say on the airplane. It’s a grueling way to go, and it’s something I’m committed to changing because I feel that in the last two years, one of which [I] was interim director and one of which was actual director, that I haven’t been able to apply the time to do research or writing that is what I feel is necessary to do.

Rabkin: You mentioned that there’s now an assistant director.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: And you also mentioned, before we started recording I think, that there’s also a development director now.

Allen: Yes.
Rabkin: Do you foresee that opening up time eventually for you to do more research and writing?

Allen: Yes, but. Here’s the rub: First of all, even having a development director, I want to say, is an endorsement by the dean’s office and central administration of the importance of the Center. The first month that I was the interim director, I went and met with the development staff and said, “Let’s really work out a fundraising plan.” They thought that was a great idea, and so eventually it’s a combination from central administration, the social sciences division, and the Center to support a full-time development officer, which involves creating collaborations and projects with other organizations, not just trying to get money. He’s outstanding and that has taken a lot of pressure off of me to be the only one trying to raise money. But, as you would imagine—[like with] this proposal we’re just submitting this morning, I’m the point person. I’m the one. And also funders want to meet with “the director,” even though I wouldn’t necessarily say anything different than what he would say, and might not even say it as well as he would say it. So having a development officer has actually increased the time that I spend on development, hopefully all to the good, but it definitely takes time away from my research, and we are a research center.

But having the assistant director—that’s a net gain because all kinds of things that I wasn’t necessarily trained to do and didn’t have time to do, like personnel actions and certain types of facility management and budget, he is now doing.
For an organization of this size, we should have been doing much more of that kind of stuff, and had more systems in place, but there wasn’t anyone to do it.

**Rabkin:** Such as what?

**Allen:** Such as having a strategic plan and a development plan—we’ve always been an organization that relied on extramural funds and ran great programs, but we never had a real clear set of priorities and plans. The Center kind of grew organically: here’s a program that developed here; here is a good program that developed there—and sort of put them together and said: That’s the Center. It’s sort of an inductive model, and I wanted more of a deductive model. Let’s have a central problematic, and then our programs emerge from that problematic. So we’ve done a strategic plan that follows much more of that model.

And all of the funding sources that we’ve had had also been kind of ad hoc and atomistic. You know, a person will get funding for that program; they’d get funding for this program. We’ve never had an overall Center budget that really set priorities. We have, for the regular state funds that we get, but everything else has been treated as kind of separate. And so to have an overall program plan with a budget that parallels that program plan, and then a development plan for how we’re going to support the things that are in our strategic plan—we had never gotten to that point before.
Rabkin: Yes. It sounds like this is kind of a turning point in the organization’s history—in that, in a sense, some of the atomization that you’ve been talking about is an artifact of the history of what eventually became CASFS.

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: Starting with Alan Chadwick—

Allen: Yes.

Rabkin: —and the garden, and then the farm and the apprentice program and formalizing that, and these pieces sort of got added in.

Allen: Right.

Rabkin: Now you’re a Center, which is a different kind of entity, but you’re also incorporating all that history, which still lives on, in the apprentice program.

Allen: Yes. And also other things that people have done. Like, we have Sean Swezey [CASFS research coordinator] and Diego Nieto [CASFS research associate] and Janet Bryer [CASFS research associate] [who] have done natural science research and have worked on-farm with growers, and they did their work, as well, [and they] had to find their own funding sources. But how that was connected to other things that the Center was doing wasn’t clear. It was clear
that it was important. It was clear that everybody thought it was a great idea, but we never had that overall programmatic statement about what we were trying to do and here are the different, important ways we were trying to do it.

Rabkin: Is the shift from, quote, “Agroecology Program” to “Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems” part of that movement toward a coordinated, centralized organization?

Allen: That was something—yes, but not something that I did. It was done as a result of our, I want to say, 1999 external academic review, where the review team said, “Agroecology doesn’t capture the social science research that’s going on at the Center.” It was their recommendation that it include “Sustainable Food Systems” in the name of the organization.

Rabkin: So here you are, you’re turning this corner, working on a sort of unified vision or, as you say, a problematic on which all of your activities are based. And at the same time, you still have this farm and garden, this residential training program. And you’re engaged in natural science research, as an organization, that’s related to farm production techniques, as well as more socially-oriented research that extends, as you have put it, “beyond the farm gate.” I wonder how it is, trying to integrate those things, as a staff and as an organization.

Allen: Well, the central “problematic,” as you say—
Rabkin: I’m quoting you.

Allen: I know. (laughs) —would be identifying the things that constrain and then can enable the transformation to sustainable food systems. In the definition of “sustainability” we include environment and social justice. So a whole range of activities is needed for that kind of a transformation. So what we have right now, what we’ve come up with in terms of three programmatic emphases is: an institute for agrifood studies that focuses primarily on social science questions; a living laboratory that focuses primarily on practical, applied research questions and practical training; and then a forum for sustainability that includes public education and leadership, capacity building, policy change. So we have these vessels, containers, if you will, for these different kinds of areas, but it makes some kind of articulated sense. I can give you a copy of the synopsis of our strategic plan—

Rabkin: Great.

Allen: —that might help to make it a little more clear. So it’s not so much that anything that we’ve been doing is not considered important. It’s more, how does this really articulate with the change we want to understand and create in the world? So the apprenticeship program, for example, has trained people who have gone on to not only have their own organic farms, but also created or worked within social change organizations. So what kind of education can we
provide people that will enhance their ability to change the food system? The natural science research—one of the reasons that Sean [Swezey] focuses primarily on pesticide reduction in organic agriculture is for the environment. But it’s also for farm worker health. There are these intersections that are in your face. So that’s the way in which things connect. There’s also connections with UC Santa Cruz undergraduate and graduate students, where we do interdisciplinary-focused kinds of activities. We bring in social issues at the same time they’re learning research methodologies on the farm; the idea that it is all a whole system.

**Rabkin:** You mentioned connections with the undergraduate and graduate education at UCSC. Do you see those connections as potentially expanding?

**Allen:** Absolutely, absolutely. The way that I see it is that the farm and the garden facilities belong to UC Santa Cruz. We have not had the mechanisms and the funding to make them as available to matriculated students as I think we should. One of my priorities in the next few years is to identify those mechanisms and funding. Right now there is a College Eight class, called Harvest for Health, where freshmen learn about the food system; they harvest food; they take it to the dining hall. That is something that could be offered through every college. I was speaking at an event with Chancellor [George] Blumenthal in Colorado a while ago, and he mentioned that it would be great if
all the students at UC Santa Cruz could learn about the farm and experience it. And I’m, like, “That’s a really good idea.” [Laughs.]

Right now I feel that the scope of the food crisis is almost unprecedented. And the interest in sustainable food systems is unprecedented. So we have this intersection of crisis and interest at the same time as we are also in a budgetary difficulty. That is very unfortunate, because until the latest round of budget cuts and the tanking of the financial markets, I felt that we were in an excellent position to expand what we’re doing. And when I talk about expansion, I don’t mean that in some mindless, “let’s grow” kind of way, but to really increase the effectiveness of what we’re doing and to increase the reach of what we’re doing. For example, the apprenticeship program is wonderful for people who can take six months out of their lives and live in a tent on the farm. Well, that’s thirty-nine people a year. And what we’re able to teach and what evidence says a lot of people want to learn, is so much bigger than that. We could have courses for UC Santa Cruz students; we could have courses for community members; we could have courses that are satellite, where we have either people going off-site, or we have some virtual education program. There’s such a need for what it is that we do and can do that could be expanded, and really be making more of a difference in the world than we already are.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of topics do you envision for courses like that?
Allen: Here at UC Santa Cruz what I would really like to do is to work with college core courses. For those that are already focused on environment, then bring the food system into the environmental discussion. For colleges such as Oakes College that are focused on race, culture, and diversity, talk about those issues through the food system. College Ten is focused on social justice. I mean, the intersections are almost endless. And then, as well as having courses for those who want to learn about how to produce food and how to market food. I feel that it’s going to become very important to know how to do those things. People can be concerned about global warming and transportation, but food is something that everybody does every day. I mean, if you’re lucky, you eat every day. Everybody thinks about food every day. It seems to me to be such a locus of social change and understanding, understanding how global warming is affected by the choices that people make in what they decide to eat, for example. So it just seems like one of those incredible heuristics.

Rabkin: Great. Can you give me some examples of ways that work done at CASFS has had statewide, or national, or even international influence?

Allen: Well, certainly the apprenticeship program. People have gone from that program to create programs, or increase the effectiveness of programs in California, and nationally and internationally. Some of the natural science research we’ve done has been absolutely path-breaking in terms of legitimizing doing regular scientific research on organic farms, and regular land grant
colleges throughout the country are now interested in creating student farms or creating organic research programs, creating sustainable agriculture programs. There’s now something like 150 sustainable agriculture programs or sub-programs in American universities, and probably ten years ago there were close to zero. Many, many of those cite the Center.

My work has had an influence in terms of changing the discourse around sustainability. It’s rare anymore that people don’t include social justice in a definition of sustainability, whereas when I was first starting out, people didn’t even know what I was talking about. So that’s been a very significant change.

Have you seen our self-study?

Rabkin: No.

Allen: I should give you some documents if you’re interested.

Rabkin: Absolutely.

Allen: We have a declaration to the U.S. Congress of the significance of the Center and the difference that it’s made, something that was read into the Congressional Record.
Rabkin: Because this project is focused especially on the development of sustainable agriculture movements on the Central Coast, I wonder if you could talk a bit about relationships between the Center and the local region in terms of impacts, in both directions.

Allen: I think there’s been a real symbiotic relationship. I don’t think you could make any claim that having the Center, then the Agroecology Program, here created California Certified Organic Farmers. CCOF started independently in Santa Cruz, my guess, although I don’t know this for sure, having nothing to do with anything that was going on at UC Santa Cruz. But through these nodes, many other organizations have located in Santa Cruz, and the thinking around sustainability has really benefited, I think, from having the university emphasis in this area, and then having all these non-governmental organizations in this area as well. And we have had numerous projects in common, and collaboratives. There’s a party in December, the Alphabet Soup party, which sort of calls out all these acronyms of these NGOs.

Rabkin: OFRF [Organic Farming Research Foundation], CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers]—

Allen: Exactly, CASFS, yes, where people all get together. There’s a sense that this is a community here in Santa Cruz. So I don’t know that there’s any
unidirectional or causal relationship in this being kind of an epicenter of sustainability, but certainly we all feed on each other.

Rabkin: And what kinds of interactions have you had in your role over the years here with those various organizations?

Allen: Because my work has been primarily social science focused, I’ve worked with, for example, the California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and the California Food and Justice Coalition, which, although it’s not headquartered here, one of the people who works with it is here. We also, back in 1995, created the Santa Cruz Food Security Project and worked with a number of organizations until we couldn’t get any more funding. But other people in the Center work very closely with people in these organizations.

I remember (this is a bit of a tangent), but one of my first jobs when I came here was to organize a farmer/researcher committee and to work with cooperative extension farm advisers. And because I’d just been in cooperative extension and working with farm advisers, I didn’t think anything of it, and was taken aback to find out how much the program was ridiculed and almost—well, disparaged by people who worked in cooperative extension here. You know, it was “those hippies on the hill,” and “That’s not serious agriculture.” I had a hard time getting farm advisers to agree to come and meet with me and walk around the farm. They were not impressed.
Now that’s really changed. We have farm advisers who come to us for information. We work very closely with different programs at UC Davis. Just last week there’s an application from a farm adviser. He needs our approval [so] that he can continue his research here with us. This is a very significant departure from how it was, lo, those many years ago, when I first arrived.

We’ve always been on the cutting edge. It’s a role that I feel is our role to play, because we’re not at a funded land grant campus, because thinking is not only allowed at UC Santa Cruz, it’s encouraged—to think in ways that others aren’t and to anticipate the next issues and to bring up critical topics that other people may not feel so comfortable talking about—that’s our role and that’s our charge.

Rabkin: So sometimes that means that you’re initially dismissed and disparaged by some segments of the agricultural community. But it sounds like you’re saying those attitudes have changed over time.

Allen: They have changed very, very significantly. The attitudes have changed, and the credibility of the Center has changed. And now our apprentices have gone on to do amazing things; our research is published in peer-reviewed journals. We’re very credible. Whereas in the earlier days, people just weren’t so sure “what those people were up to.”
Rabkin: You’re part of the UCSC Agrifood Studies Research Group. And I’m curious about the kinds of collaborations you’ve been engaged in with colleagues on that group: Melanie DuPuis, Julie Guthman, Margaret FitzSimmons, David Goodman and other people.

Allen: The Agrifood Working Group is something that back in 1990 I tried to get started, working with Bill Friedland. It’s gone through different phases over time, but Margaret FitzSimmons, David Goodman, Melanie DuPuis, Bill Friedland, Julie Guthman, Melissa Caldwell, myself have been involved and—when people hear we have that concentration at UC Santa Cruz, they are so jealous, because even though we are not at a land grant college and we don’t have a rural sociology department—you know, you go to meetings and people say things like, “You have the best rural sociology department in the country.” But we don’t have one. So it’s been an incredible exchange of ideas.

In terms of research projects, Margaret FitzSimmons and I did a research project back in, I want to say 2000, where we studied what non-governmental organizations—alternative, agrifood initiatives, we called them—how were they really conceptualizing sustainability and social justice? What was the kind of work that they were doing? And did they feel that there were constraints in their work, or that they were able to really do everything they wanted to do? It was fascinating, what we learned from that project.
And I’ve done research projects with Julie Guthman focusing on farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture. She and I were hoping to be able to evaluate—I don’t know if you’ve heard of this Roots of Change Project. Well, Julie and I met with the people who started that, wanting to do a history, if you will, as the project progressed. They weren’t interested in doing that, but that was something we were very focused on for a while.

Julie—she’s a wonderful scholar—all these people are incredible assets to UC Santa Cruz. I would love to find some way—yes, we have the Agrifood Working Group, the Agrifood Seminar, but some way to really catalyze a reaction where we’re working together on some kind of common project. And I know that that’s not completely realistic because faculty define their research areas, and that can change. So you may be really interested in food issues this year, but next year maybe you’re interested in transportation. But there’s such a wealth of intellect and experience and expertise here. We could have an astonishing program. I would love to be an interdepartmental degree program, but somebody else will have to carry that water. I mean, I’d love to participate in it, but I’m not a departmental faculty member.

**Rabkin:** Despite that fact that you don’t have a specific degree-granting program in this topic area, has the cluster of all of you doing this work at UCSC brought in graduate students specifically who are interested in working on food-related issues?
Allen: I would say so. It would be best to ask someone in a department that question, because I don’t see the applications. But definitely the word on the street is, if you want to do agrifood studies go to UC Santa Cruz.

Rabkin: And your group has included grad students from time to time: Jill Harrison, Michael Goodman—

Allen: Yes, Andrew Marshall, Hilary Melcarek, Keith Warner, Amy Morris, and others. It’s a group that is designed to include graduate students. And I also have had many, many graduate student researchers and have been on dissertation committees of graduate students and worked closely with graduate students in different ways.

Rabkin: So you can sit on those committees even though you’re not technically a faculty member per se.

Allen: Yes. I can be an outside member. I can’t chair a committee, and I can’t bring graduate students to UC Santa Cruz since I am not in a department. So if someone else gets a graduate student who wants me to be on their committee, then I can be an outside member but not really having a directive role.

Other Key Colleagues
**Rabkin:** Among your predecessors and colleagues in the Center, are there any who have been especially influential, either inspiring or provocative or both?

**Allen:** Well, Kay Thornley was incredibly inspiring.

**Rabkin:** Tell me about that.

**Allen:** Kay is somebody who would see something that needs to be done and get it done, and who really understood the range of issues that needed to be addressed in the food system, an incredibly committed person, and someone who wanted everyone to feel as good about what they were doing as they possibly could. She was a very inspirational kind of a person.

**Rabkin:** How did she enact that desire?

**Allen:** I don’t know. Just by force of personality, I think. She’s just one of those people who genuinely cared about the world and the people in it, and that rubbed off on other people. Everyone with whom I work and have worked is inspirational in one way or another. I’m not just saying that. Whether it’s because of their astonishing ideas, because of overcoming adversity, and you’re doing the work anyway, the commitment to social change—there isn’t a single person who is just doing the time. Everybody who works at the Center or who has ever worked at the Center is on a mission. They’re really committed to developing
sustainable food systems. And that’s a phenomenal treat. To be able to be in a staff meeting and know that every person in that room is really committed to the same goal—in different ways, doing different things—but everybody is doing the best they can to create that change, it’s wonderful. It’s such a privilege. And everybody in their own ways.

Steve Gliessman is someone who thinks very broadly, who’s able to inspire incredible numbers of students, who is tireless. He just sees the need, and he develops a program and is absolutely committed to doing the best he can to change the food system. He’s primarily focused on agroecology, but not exclusively. He started the CAN [Community Agroecology Network] project.

And Carol Shennan is inspiring in that she is someone who is an excellent natural scientist but has never thought that it stopped there, whether it’s her research in Mongolia or her research in Tule Lake, where she brought people together to talk about the issues that they were facing with the agricultural landscape. She’s someone who sees the whole picture and who always supported the work that I wanted to do on the social issues of sustainability. That was very inspiring to me, to see someone who knows that this isn’t their area, but it’s important and so we’re going to support you to do it. Carol also was someone who never tried to control people. She would let them flourish for what they were really the best at. In a director, I think that’s an incredible quality.
So they’re all inspiring.

**Rabkin:** You have such a large and diverse staff, some of whom occupy really disparate niches within the Center—from field managers in the farm and the garden, to people who spend most of their time in an office. I’m wondering how, as a staff, you maintain a sense of social and professional coherence. Do you have ways of coming together to sustain that?

**Allen:** That’s a very prescient question. We used to all be located at the farm (except for one person at the garden near Merrill College), and at that point there were casual interactions that understood that people were working on different aspects of the same thing but we were a team. About—I don’t know, it must be over a year ago at this point we were in trailers, and the trailers were condemned and taken to the dump. We didn’t have funds to build an office building at the farm, and so we moved to Oakes. Now, the good news about that is that that’s the first time that the campus had ever allocated space to Center staff in a regular campus building. So that was an incredible moment of legitimization. And there’s indoor bathrooms. (Very cool.)

The downside to that is that it has created something of a division, a perceived division between mental and manual labor. The people on the farm are not sure what’s really going on in the offices, and vice versa. How do we get around that? One idea that I had was to develop this strategic plan so that it would be [as]
clear as possible that, yes, people are working in very different domains, with very different tools. Some work with computers, some work with shovels. We’re all working in the same direction, toward the same overall goal. So that’s one thing.

And then we have monthly staff meetings where we share what’s going on. We have an intra-web communications site that I set up that is not just posting things but also a forum, opportunities for discourse. And then it’s clear to me that we need just plain get-together time, just to be together.

**Rabkin:** “Together at the table.”

**Allen:** Together at the table. There you go! Actually, that’s what we’ll call [it]. Okay.

The problem with that is everyone is so busy. I don’t know anybody who works at the Center who works a normal work schedule. People are so committed and so busy that it’s almost impossible for anyone to even fathom carving out time to just *be*. Yet it’s becoming increasingly clear to me that if we don’t do that, then we’ve lost something. We’ve lost that sense that we’re all part of a team. We need to have that perspective and that feeling, I think, to be as powerful as we can be. So we’re working on it.
Rabkin: Great. Yes. Since you’re all about food, do you think about having meals together?

Allen: Well, there have been—the apprentices cook meals in the farm center, and that was open to staff sometimes for some fee. What I’m doing in December is to just have a winter gathering, and it’ll be—in these budgetary times, of course, it’ll be potluck. But, yes, just people bring something to eat, sit around. We’ve got incredibly talented musicians. Some people play music. Some people cook. And just hang out together for a couple of hours, without an agenda per se, because we’ve made a lot of changes in the last year and have done a lot of work. Having a strategic plan is kind of an alien idea. We’ve gone through some reorganization. We have new staff. And we haven’t ever really sat back and said, “Wow! This is what we’ve all done together.” And some of it is great, and some of it people would probably prefer to be different, but they can give voice to that.

Rabkin: I’d like to ask you two or three more questions about CASFS, and then I have a whole page of questions about specifically your research, and I’d like to save those for another interview session. I’d just like to ask you if there are aspects of this job that keep you awake at night.

Allen: Oh, are you kidding me?! I never sleep. Yes, there are. Because we are so dependent on extramural funds, I worry about being able to keep people hired, being able to maintain people’s jobs. I worry about being able to serve university
programs and be relevant to regular students and faculty, and yet not having any funding to do those kinds of things. I worry about liability issues on the farm, big time, and how can we really all feel great about the Center, knowing that we’re doing very, very different kinds of things? How can we be that very powerful team that isn’t dependent just on stars?

**Rabkin:** What aspects of your work at CASFS so far are you most proud of, or are most gratifying for you?

**Allen:** I am most proud of the research and the writing that I’ve done. I feel that it has really helped to define an agenda for sustainability that includes equity and justice issues, and I’m very proud of that. I admit it.

**Rabkin:** Great. And what are your hopes and visions for the future development of CASFS? You’ve touched on some of this, but I wonder if there’s anything you’d like to add.

**Allen:** My hope for the Center is that it becomes a place where we are doing the most cutting-edge research and intellectual activity, and being able to train people in practical skills, so that we are able to engage people in discourse about critical food issues and teach people the skills that they need to flourish in the food system, and that we actually make a difference in changing the food system
at a policy level and at a social movement level. If we do that, then my life will have been worthwhile.

**Rabkin:** So you see the intellectual and analytical aspects of your work here and the on-the-ground, practical training aspects as integrated and synergistic.

**Allen:** Absolutely. And necessary. When I used to be more close to the ground than I’m able to be at this point, I remember when I was in academic courses or going to scholarly conferences, I would think of the academics, gosh we really need to get out there and do something, not just sit around and think! And then I’d be in these meetings of NGOs and I’d think, of the activists, gosh we really need theory to inform our actions! The intersection of the theoretical and the practical, all moving in the direction of environmental soundness and social justice—that would be my dream.

**Rabkin:** Great.

**Allen:** And that we change the world.

**Rabkin:** Anything else you’d like to add?

**Allen:** And that no child ever goes hungry, ever. The first book I did was an edited volume, and my child had just been born—She was born premature. I
don’t know, stress (because I was still working frantically), and she wouldn’t nurse, and she was hungry.

**Rabkin:** Oh.

**Allen:** And she cried and cried and cried.

**Rabkin:** Oh, boy.

**Allen:** And I thought, What if I couldn’t feed her? What if she died because I was too poor to feed her or didn’t have health care? And that affected me more than anything ever. Yes, that was just really rugged. [chokes up] And it’s so unnecessary. Yes, so that definitely drives me.

**Rabkin:** What a graphic, personal metaphor for the larger work that you do in the world.

**Allen:** Yes. I mean, imagine hearing your child cry and you can’t feed them because you’re poor. I don’t want to live in that world.

**Rabkin:** Well, thank you so much, Patricia.

**Allen:** Well, thank you, and thank you for your persistence and patience.
Rabkin: It is May 21st, 2009. This is Sarah Rabkin. I am at Oakes College with Patricia Allen for our second interview. So, Patricia, at our first interview we focused mostly on your background, your education and training, and how you ended up working with CASFS and doing what you’re doing now, and we also spent some time talking about CASFS as an organization. This time, what I’d like to do is dedicate most of our time to talking about research, and primarily the research that you have done personally, although we’ll start with a little bit of background about the research mission of CASFS.

**Building Housing for CASFS Apprentices**

Before we even get into that, though: since our last interview, there’s been a lot happening at CASFS, I know, including a major push to pay for and establish permanent housing for the apprentices at the Farm and Garden. So I’d like to ask you just to give me a little bit of an update about that and any other major happenings at CASFS that might be worth mentioning.

Allen: Okay. Yes, for a number of reasons, including that there’s a camping ban on campus and for health and safety reasons, this year, right now, will be the last year that apprentices will be able to live in tents on the farm, and so we have permission from the university to build eight tent cabins, which would house thirty-two people because they’re all quad units. This will cost somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Because
capital campaigns need to be extramurally funded, and in any case we wouldn’t have the money to do this, there has been a major fundraising effort that has been going on. This has culminated in the Grow a Farmer campaign in which a number of restaurants and former apprentices have participated. People are contributing to this campaign either in very large ways, or by contributing a few dollars that they have. It seems to have a lot of publicity. I talk to people who know hardly anything about the Center but they’ve heard of the Grow a Farmer campaign, so it is being very successful in that regard. We’re hopeful that by the end of June we’ll have all the money in place to build the tent cabins.

**Sustainable Agriculture Systems Research**

**Rabkin:** Let’s move on, then, to talking about research. I want to start with something that comes from the first pages of the January 2008 self-study that the organization did, which says, “Members of CASFS have long treated the establishment of sustainable agrifood systems as an intrinsically interdisciplinary subject requiring research in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.” So if you would, I’d like to start with some of your thoughts about why and how interdisciplinary research informs and shapes and enables the establishment of sustainable agrifood systems. Why is research so important?

**Allen:** Research is important because it’s the way in which we discover new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking about things. Without research
and innovation, all we could do is to keep treading, walking along the same path that has gotten us into the situation that we’re in right now. When we talk about interdisciplinary research, it’s because the agrifood system, of course, is interdisciplinary. There’s producing on farms; there’s farm labor relationships; there’s who owns the land; there’s what are consumers thinking about, how do they make their choices, how do they decide how they’re going to intervene in the food system; there’s public policy, which determines, largely, what kind of a food system we have in this country; there’s hunger in this country and certainly in other countries; and then there’s the aesthetics of food and the art of food. So it really does encompass all the disciplines.

**Rabkin:** Are there people affiliated with CASFS who in fact are doing work related to that last category that you mentioned, the aesthetics and art of food?

**Allen:** It’s interesting. I don’t know if you’ve heard of *Gastronomica* magazine, but it is a magazine dedicated to food and culture that comes out of University of California Press. UC Santa Cruz sociologist Melanie DuPuis edited a special issue of *Gastronomica* that had a lot of the social justice kind of research from [E.] Melanie DuPuis, Julie Guthman [and] myself, and also articles about the aesthetics of food.” So that’s just one example.

And then from time to time, we’ll participate in conferences, but it is not an area in which the Center itself has dedicated research. But I have high hopes of
developing relationships with the arts department and the literature department and the people that are involved in writing courses. And, in fact, we will be funding a writing course in Oakes College next spring (I’m meeting about that this afternoon) that will be a writing-intensive class focused on food and labor and, I would assume, literature.

Rabkin: Wow.

**Studying Discourse and the Food System**

A lot of your research focuses on analyzing the ideologies and discourses of emerging movements for sustainable agriculture and food security. I’m wondering if you can give me an example or two to help illustrate how studying discourse can yield valuable insights.

Allen: Well, certainly the way in which people think about things and talk about things shapes the way in which we define research problems, for example, or the way that we naturalize the system that currently exists.

Rabkin: What do you mean, “naturalize”?

Allen: Make it seem as if it’s the only way it could be.
Rabkin: I see.

Allen: For example, yesterday at our strawberry festival, some of the students on campus organized a workshop on strawberries and social justice. I went to this workshop, and there was a student there who said, “One of the issues is that farmers need to make more money, and so a lot of them are growing organic strawberries, but then, on the other hand, you hear that organic food is so expensive that then low-income people can’t afford it. So how does this get resolved?” By looking at discourse and ideology, you can see that even the way in which that question is shaped is determined by this idea of a free market system. And so you’re historicizing and opening up what we think about in terms of what’s possible, that it doesn’t just have to be that contradiction. You can look at other ways of addressing the problems.

Rabkin: What might be some other ways of framing or shaping that particular question about farmers needing to make a living versus people needing to be able to afford food?

Allen: Well, one way in which that could be shaped is rather than assuming that people’s access to food has to happen through a market mechanism, which is in fact determined by income, we could be looking at other ways of making sure that people have food in this country and other countries as well. So to turn the discourse around food from one that is based on ability to pay to a discourse of
human rights, for example, a discourse of entitlement. That really changes the way you even think about the questions that need to be addressed. So that’s one example.

Another example is that when we talk about sustainable food systems, a lot of the emphasis is on farmers and what farmers need and the production system. Really, when you look at it, about seven percent or so of the people who work in the food system in this country are working in production itself. Of that percentage, a very, very small percentage are farmers; the rest are hired farm workers. And so if you just change the frame to say, well, the food system can also be looking at it through the lens of who’s working in the food system, it changes where we’re putting emphasis in research, and it changes who we’re really trying to benefit through our work in changing the food system. We rarely talk about food processing workers. We rarely talk about truckers. And when people talk about farm workers, it often doesn’t address the needs of the workers themselves. It’s more in terms of: well, what could be feasible for farmers to do? So it really shapes—it just changes how we frame questions and who we look at our world.

Rabkin: Do you think that part of the way that people reflexively think in this culture, in this society, about farming and food production is partly a holdover from our nursery rhyme days, when we had—what was his name, “Old MacDonald—“
Allen: Old MacDonald.

Rabkin: “—Had a Farm,” or the “Farmer in the Dell”: that when people talk about farmers, somewhere in the back of their mind is this image of the small farmer proprietor who’s got goats and pigs and sheep and cows and the garden patch.

Allen: Yes. I think that that’s entirely possible. To be honest, I don’t know how much people have any image of farmers. You hear all the time, “Well, people don’t even know where their food comes from.” So it’s I think partly a complete alienation from the food system along with a romanticization, like what you’re talking about. I think that the whole industrialization of food is something that’s outside of most people’s realm of consciousness. I also think that there is a tendency, as you said, to romanticize the farm and the farmer. It’s beautiful and it’s wonderful and clean and happy. Even on small farms, that’s not necessarily the reality, although it certainly can be.

Rabkin: Can you give me an example of how a clearer understanding of the current economic system of food production might help us respond to the problems differently?

Allen: I think that if people understood the way in which the food system works and the environmental costs of that and the human costs of that, I think that
people would be willing to become more active in changing the food system, whether on a very small, local basis in their community and then, I would imagine, a few people would be more interested in changing federal policy and international policy as well. I think that most people simply don’t know.

**Rabkin:** So a lot of this seems to come down the question of public awareness and education—

**Allen:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** —about how food systems really work—

**Allen:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** —and that dramatically increased public awareness might really change the landscape. To what extent do you or other people doing research with CASFS study how to increase education and public awareness and communication about food systems?

**Allen:** That is something that we absolutely want to do. It has not been part of our portfolio up until now. The Center has kind of progressed in an organic way. I think we talked about last time, is there’s this project and that project. And now we’re developing a strategic plan that’s going to be more directed in what we do,
and this is a top priority. However, it’s something for which we would need to be getting extramural funds, and so that is always in play. You can only do the work for which you can get funding. But I was just talking yesterday to someone in the education department here on campus about how can we be looking at the kinds of education programs that we do run, like the apprenticeship, to make them more open to people that have different kinds of time and financial constraints, that have different life experiences, and have this be an adult education program that doesn’t just focus on horticulture but also on social issues and how people can get involved, however they would like, in the food system. So it’s an area in which we are absolutely planning to move because I think it’s crucial.

Also, as I mentioned, we’re going to be working with Oakes College in developing a course. We’re also working with Kresge College in developing a course on food systems theory and practice. These are things that have never been done, and so we’re working through the college system. There’s already a sustainable agriculture class that’s taught in environmental studies. It’s an excellent class. But we’re trying to reach the broad base of the campus population. I believe that people that go to the University of California often go on to be leaders in our society, so this is another venue.

**Rabkin:** Great. Thank you.
You, yourself, have done research on affordability of organic food for low-income people, organic food in particular, and ways of broadening access to farmers’ markets, CSAs and that kind of thing. When I wrote this question, it was from a relatively narrow perspective, and your earlier comments about re-visioning the whole way we think economically about food systems might reframe this question. But tell me about the major barriers to access to healthy, fresh, local, organic food and what strategies have been or could be successful in overcoming them.

**Allen:** Research that Julie Guthman and I have done, and research with Jan Perez has looked at farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture, with the question of: Is there a congruence between meeting farm security needs—in other words, income for farmers—and food security needs: access to food for low-income people. And we find, in fact, that those are outside of the realm of public intervention through subsidy. They are contradictory, because farmers need to make higher incomes, which raises the price of food, which then makes it less accessible to low-income people. This is true of farmers’ markets, and it’s also true of community-supported agriculture. And even though in our research we found that the leaders of these organizations were absolutely committed to increasing access for low-income people and saw meeting food security needs as one of their top priorities, the actual practices in which they were able to engage,
they didn’t feel were successful in meeting those objectives. Some things that people tend to do is the excess may be donated to a food bank, which is wonderful, but it’s not changing the structural situation.

And aside from the economic barriers to participation in these alternatives for fresh, local food, there are also cultural barriers. People don’t necessarily feel comfortable, that it’s not part of their world, that getting a box from a CSA feels like what you got from the food bank. People that participate in community supported agriculture tend to be affluent, European American, highly educated people. There was a CSA in Iowa where they purposely tried to get low-income participants and in fact, all the CSA members did meet criteria of low income, but they tended to be those such as professionals who were between jobs rather than the chronically poor. The objective to really affect the class makeup of the CSA members was not successful, partly because of cultural barriers.

Rabkin: In interviewing farmers’ market managers in the Central Coast, I’ve heard repeatedly about their use of electronic benefits transfer and other kinds of social welfare programs to help break down those barriers of access to farmers’ markets. Have you seen much success in that area?

Allen: Well, certainly it’s a big help if you can use your EBT card at a farmers’ market. Not all farmers’ markets can afford the technology in order to use the EBT cards, but I have heard that the USDA is funding farmers’ markets to make
it more affordable for farmers’ markets to have EBT cards, being able to use them.

But at the same time, it’s also the case that many low-income people don’t have access to transportation. They may be working two and three jobs. They may not have the childcare that they need to make going to the farmers’ market feasible. And so there are other barriers besides economic barriers. But I would say that the economic is probably paramount. That’s an empirical question. We’d have to go out and interview all these people, which would require funding.

Rabkin: [Scarce funding is] a subject that’s going to come up periodically in this conversation. Have you seen any progress or particular problems in relation to this access question, on the Central Coast in particular?

Allen: Certainly, there are many excellent organizations working to improve access to healthy food in the region. We need to develop new social and economic models, working with communities, to create systems that make things like emergency food distribution a faint memory of the past. We have a multi-campus proposal into the UC Office of the President to do just that—Collaborative Research for an Equitable California. In the meantime, we’re looking at alternative economic models that could benefit the region.

**Gender and Agriculture**
One of your research emphases has to do with gender representation and relations in agriculture, and I’m curious about what some of your most interesting findings have been in that area.

**Allen:** Well, this is a research project empirically that we’re just getting started on. In fact, I was just reviewing the interview guide. And so what we’re looking at is: obviously in the food and agriculture system there are incredible inequalities related to gender, in terms of access to resources, such as access to land, the number of women-owned businesses, the wages that women earn, the double labor that women do in the food system and then still being responsible for food procurement and provision at home. We know these things, but we don’t know much about how people really experience it and how these inequalities get reproduced in the workplace and at home. So this is the subject of a National Science Foundation grant that we received, and we’re just starting that kind of research. In that research, we’re looking at people that work in the production system—farmers and farm workers—and we’re looking at people that work in the restaurant field—waiters, cleaners, and so forth.

We also are doing a similar project that’s looking at leaders and activists in the food system, and trying to understand how people are experiencing gender. Does it affect what they do? What do they observe? There was a time when I first got into this field, which was a long, long time ago, where I was always the only woman in any kind of a meeting. You would go to conferences, and the panels...
and the speakers would be almost exclusively men, and yet women would be the ones that would be organizing the conferences and making sure that there were the snacks and getting the mailings out. That has changed dramatically in the couple of decades that I’ve been doing this work. And that is wonderful. I have seen a phenomenal change in attitude toward and representation of women in the academic sphere of sustainable food systems.

**Rabkin:** And are you going to be asking, in part, how that change has occurred, what caused it to come about?

**Allen:** In our project, we are focusing on workers, and so we’re not talking to sustainable agriculture leaders. I would love to do that project as well. In the project where I mentioned that we’re talking to leaders and activists, our sample for that was primarily people who were invited to a retreat on justice in the food system that was held last August in Vermont. So interestingly, these are people who don’t use the term “sustainable agriculture.” They are almost all people of color who actually feel that the sustainable agriculture movement has not done much for people of color, and believe that what we really need to be focusing on is food justice, that sustainable agriculture is something that, as I said, prioritized the needs of people who already have enough, or more than they do, and that we needed to really, again, shift the discourse of what it is that we’re really talking about.
**Rabkin:** And what kinds of questions will you be asking those leaders to respond to? What kind of information are you hoping to glean from that study?

**Allen:** What we’re hoping to glean from that are ways which they observe that gender either does or does not play a role in who the leadership is, in what issues are considered important, and then, at a personal level, the ways in which their work shapes their experience of food at home, and vice versa. So we’re trying to look at the intersections between paid and domestic labor around food and also the way in which people think about their labor, not just the physical work, is it affected but also the ways in which people conceptualize what they’re doing in the world. (That’s a little abstract.) And then we’re also looking at, to the extent that people do see inequalities, how do they explain that, have they seen changes, what did they see as the practices that have either helped to overcome inequality or helped to reproduce inequality.

**Rabkin:** The aspect of that project that focuses on the relationship between domestic relationships with food and work and workplace relationships reminds me about the sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s work.

**Allen:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** She published a popular book called *The Second Shift*—
Allen: Right.

Rabkin: —where what she was looking at was the proportion of domestic labor that members of two-person households were dedicating themselves to. I think these were all heterosexual couples, and in cases where both the man and the woman worked outside the house. She was looking at the domestic labor happening inside the house and how it was conceived. This sounds, in some ways, like sort of a food-focused furthering of those inquiries.

Allen: Absolutely, absolutely, with the added twist of how your paid labor affects your domestic food labor and vice versa. And what little research has been done shows that while there has been some equalization of domestic labor, divided by gender, over time, that that isn’t true in food labor. So that’s one of the things in which we’re interested.

**Social Justice and Organic Certification**

Rabkin: Let’s move on to another focal point of your research, which has been about the role of labor in agriculture. So I’m going to start with a question that may generate others. I’m wondering what you think about arguments for making labor justice an element of organic certification criteria.
Allen: This is an interesting one, and I can argue both angles here. In my mind, what we’re trying to do is make the food system more sustainable, and I include social justice as a key component of sustainability. So, on the one hand, it doesn’t make that much sense to me that we would have certification criteria for only one aspect of sustainability. On the other hand, I understand that organic growers will make the argument that if they have to be held to a higher standard for organic, not only in terms of production but also in terms of labor practices, then they will be priced out of the market. And so I understand that argument as long as we are working in this market economy for food. However, that makes it difficult to see organic as anything except a piece of the puzzle. It can’t be the whole answer. It has to be contextualized in terms of everything we’re trying to change about the food system.

But there are a number of organizations and certification efforts going on right now, and in fact, one of them, the Agricultural Justice Project, will be doing a seminar here June 3rd, [2009], on the idea of “beyond organic,” partly because of a recognized need to address labor and equity issues and partly because of the organic label, in some ways, people feeling that it’s been co-opted by very large-scale agriculture and that looking for another marketing tool to get premium prices—like with Jim Cochran, our local strawberry grower. Yes, his strawberries are organic, and yes, he has a union contract. This is something that people are interested in purchasing from him, not only because he has great
strawberries but also because he is trying to do the right thing in terms of labor equity.

**Rabkin:** So there can be a certain commercial cachet, at least in certain buying circles, associated with that sort of justice certification that comes with a union contract.

**Allen:** Exactly. Now, the United States is not known for its pro-union sentiments, and the little bit of research that we’ve been able to do about this, asking students: Would they consider paying more for food if it met social justice criteria? How important is it to them that their food is produced in a socially just way? We found overwhelming evidence that they *are* interested, that this *is* a priority. It’s not just environment; they’re also interested in equity in their food.\(^xvii\)

Now, this is a fairly select group when you’re talking to undergraduate students, and it’s work that needs to be done in a more comprehensive, more national kind of study. We have done a little bit of research on looking at preference for different kinds of labels and have found that people are very interested in humane labels, they’re interested in labels that would have to do with worker rights, and interestingly, our preliminary data indicate that they’re more interested in living wage for workers than in small farms, local, or organic food.
Rabkin: And when you say “they,” who is being polled?

Allen: This was a national survey. It was a forced choice: “Would you pick humane or would you pick local?” “Would you pick—” So there’s a lot of work to be done to understand why we got those results. This was a just sort of a staccato kind of survey. We don’t understand the meaning behind the results particularly, but it would make a fascinating qualitative study to try to understand why people are making those choices and what goes into their thinking around that, because we were very surprised, in fact, to find—I think the thing that was valued the least was “small.” And yet all the time, the discourse of the movement, if you will, is about small scale, whereas the population that we studied wasn’t interested in small.

Rabkin: I guess those preferences depend in part on what dichotomy you’re being offered as someone responding to a poll. I mean, if somebody were to ask me would I choose humane or local, immediately I feel as if that might be a false dichotomy and I’d be asking myself whether there are ways in which non-local food sources engender inhumane practices in and of themselves.

Allen: Right. But it wasn’t just asking it once. It was a bunch of—

Rabkin: Lots of juxtapositions.
Allen: Right, exactly. But I still do take your point. And so, not understanding the reasons behind people’s choices definitely limits our ability to interpret.

Rabkin: Yes, interesting. Also, questions like that sort of bring us back full circle again. When you talk about certain groups like college students indicating that they would be willing to pay more money for food that was produced under socially just conditions, it raises the question of what do you do about the idea that it costs more to have humanely or socially justly produced food when, then, the workers’ conditions may be more fair and equitable, but you raise the access barrier for consumers again.

Allen: Right.

Rabkin: And the only people who can have access to this justly produced food are people in upper-income brackets.

Allen: Right, right. Exactly. We stratified this by income, and the low-income people were more interested in social equity and labor conditions in the food system. We asked a question specifically about strawberries, which I consider personally to be a luxury crop anyway, and paying five cents more for a basket of strawberries could, if it’s passed on to the workers, make a huge difference in wages and working conditions. So we’re not necessarily talking about huge differences.
Rabkin: Yes. When I asked you the question about arguments for making labor justice an element of organic certification criteria, you said that part of the problem there is that having to create more just conditions for their workers could, in a competitive environment where organic farmers are competing with conventional farmers and their businesses, drive them out of business. So, as you say, it forces us to look at bigger questions about the whole system. So if that’s true, I’m just wondering where you start to change a system. Because what we have right now is organic certification versus conventional products, and if you can’t introduce that kind of fairness through an organic certification criterion, how do you see changing the system so that things are more fair?

Allen: First of all, I think that you need to approach it from at least two different directions. There are certification efforts that are beginning to include social justice criteria as well as environmental criteria. Maybe they don’t go far enough. Maybe not everyone will be able to afford it. But it is creating that reality. And regardless of how much it’s actually accomplishing, it’s getting people to think differently: Oh! Here’s another idea. Here’s a possibility. So that’s one thing. It’s what’s actually being accomplished, as well as changing the way people are really thinking about and conceptualizing what’s possible.

Then the other angle is regulation, public policy, and subsidy, that perhaps farmers that have paid decent wages, have decent working conditions and so on, are guaranteed a certain income from the federal government. I mean, goodness
knows, we have all kinds of subsidy programs in U.S. agriculture that pay out millions and millions of dollars. It’s how we decide to use those millions of dollars that really makes the difference.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of activities does that system currently subsidize?

**Allen:** It subsidizes the commodity programs—such as cotton, corn, wheat—and pays farmers a guarantee, regardless of what is produced, and in some cases pays to not produce because there could be a surplus on the market, which would then drive prices down. Over time, there’s been a very small shift to creating some subsidies for farmers that provide environmental services or have conservation programs. But so far, we haven’t gotten to the point where we’re providing any kinds of subsidies for programs that address labor issues or gender issues or access to land for people that haven’t traditionally had it.

**Rabkin:** So you’re talking about a kind of radical re-visioning of the way food policy works on a national level. And, of course, we have a new administration now, and I’m wondering to what degree you see signs of receptivity to this kind of change at the national level.

**Allen:** I think that people like the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and the Farmers Union are chipping away, but it is a monolith at which they are chipping. I think that increasingly, there will be receptivity in the current
administration, but things have been this way for so very, very long that it’s absolutely not going to happen overnight. I think that we need models on the ground of the ways in which things could work that will be illustrations of how things could be different, that it can’t just all live in the realm of theory. There will be opportunities to change policies, like the subsidy programs. Whether there’s the political will to stand up to that is an unanswered question. I think we’ve had very mixed results so far.

Rabkin: You talked about models on the ground. Can you point to some already in existence?

Allen: I think that there are examples of programs that are very successful in some ways. We have the Homeless Garden Project here in Santa Cruz that provides opportunities for job training and for safety and for food for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I think that the Agricultural Justice Project is another example of working on certification that includes both environmental and social criteria. There are land trusts that run community supported agriculture programs and so are not necessarily so dependent on the market mechanism—you know, not being a private owner that’s also trying to make your mortgage payment and therefore has to keep prices at a certain way—that really do fulfill the idea of community supported agriculture.
There are a number of urban gardening projects around the country, in cities where there are people that have lost their jobs and are very fragile economically. And, while these programs obviously aren’t solving the problems that everyone faces, they are providing food, they’re providing employment, they’re providing job training. So there are a lot of really bright spots right now in the food system. And because of a number of crises that have been in the press and because of some of the popular publications, movies that came out, like *Super Size Me* and so on, there is a phenomenal interest among the public right now in the food system. People are really starting to pay attention. What information they get, I think, is going to determine, again, the choices that they make and the areas in which they want to engage.

**Rabkin:** You’ve written about the need and the opportunity for social justice and environmental movements to work more closely together. And I’m wondering if you’ve seen some strong examples of that kind of collaboration emerging.

**Allen:** Certainly way back in the grape boycott of long ago, there were environmental issues, pesticide issues placed side-by-side with labor justice issues. The same thing happened in the strawberry campaign in the Central Coast a while ago. Those are examples. On the whole, I haven’t seen major efforts to connect environment and equity coming together in this area, and it’s absolutely where we need to go. The environmental and the equity issues have to
come together, not just conceptually but also in terms of social movements and legislation.

**Rabkin:** To go back to the strawberries, when you mentioned Jim Cochran, it was occurring to me that his is the only name that I’ve heard mentioned in conjunction with a union labor contract on an organic farm. I don’t know if he is the only farmer in this region who has such a contract, but certainly it sounds to me as if he’s one of very few, at best. Why is it so rare to have a relatively small farmer sign a UFW [United Farm Workers] contract?

**Allen:** I think that there are both economic and ideological reasons for that. This is a question I would like to ask Jim. He would, I’m sure, know much better than I would. It’s more expensive if you have a union contract. It’s more expensive not just economically but then there are rules that—you can’t be as flexible in changing things. Then there’s also just a historical, long-standing animosity between farmers and farm workers, and some employers seem to just have a complete knee-jerk reaction to the idea of anything having to do with unionization. And, in fact, Julie Guthman and colleagues did some research that found that farm workers were happier working on larger farms because they had more opportunities, perhaps, for a union contract, or to have better wages, better health conditions. It was more possible to do that when you’re running a larger organization. The idea that it’s better to work on a small farm was not borne out by the farm workers.
The Strengths and Limitations of Food-System Localism

Rabkin: In your research on movements for sustainability and justice in the food system, you’ve often touched on the limitations of localism as a goal. Could you talk about the strengths and limitations of food-system localism?

Allen: I think the strength of food-system localism is that it becomes very real for people. People can see right in front of them what the food system looks like, who’s participating in the food system, who’s winning, who’s losing. And that is a real strength for organizing, for community engagement. And certainly if you are interested in eating in season, it will become very visible to you what you can eat at any given time of the year. I think the strength is really community building and community engagement.

The weaknesses are that if we are focused only on our community, then what about everybody else? And in what sense is it defensible to say: This is the cluster of people about whom I need to be concerned, and not those other people. When there’s arguments about, we’re keeping money in the community, I’ve never understood that, to be honest. I don’t understand what the importance of that is. Like, why would we want to build our community against another community, sort of defend ourselves? I was at some meeting (this was a while ago) where people had developed a local food system and they were celebrating the idea that they weren’t having food trucked in from a neighboring
community. I asked the question, “How did that affect those truckers and their livelihoods?” And that was just like a deer-in-the-headlights kind of question for people. They hadn’t thought of that as part of what they were trying to do. Communities have been played off each other throughout history, for economic advantage, and to me, this seems like it could be more of the same.

Also, there isn’t really any evidence that because something happens on a community scale it will necessarily be more equitable. In fact, the evidence, I would argue, is to the contrary, and that real changes we’ve made in this country—with the feminist movement, the civil rights movement, the abolition movement—it wasn’t local. It was national, people coming together with common commitments to create large-scale change.

The other issue that I have with localism is that because people happen to live in a particular place doesn’t necessarily entitle them to particular assets or entitlements, and certainly history is about nothing if not the expropriation of value from other people. So if we have our Marin County here and our Santa Cruz County here, and we say, well, we’re taken care of—you know, we can take care of ourselves. But some other community that has really been stripped of its resources by those in another region, is then left with much less than they otherwise might have had. And if we were to start history now, we’d have a very, very unequal distribution of resources in the world and in the country.
Rabkin: My understanding is some of that discourse about keeping wealth local is not necessarily so much about preventing wealth in this community from moving into another community, but preventing it from being sucked out of the community by global entities, multinational corporations. So a lot of that discourse, it seems to me, was born out of resistance to big-box stores and other corporations that have economies of scale, can come into a small community, out-compete local businesses, make a profit, which then goes outside of the community but not to another community; it goes to the coffers of the CEO’S and boards of directors of those corporations.

Allen: I agree with you that that is the source of the impulse, and I talk about this a bit in my book. But then I would say—and, again, this is a discursive question: What really is the question that we’re trying to address? What really is the problem that we’re trying to address? If it is hyper-profits by corporations, then let’s address hyper-profits by corporations. Let’s not say, well, then we need a local system, because it doesn’t necessarily solve the problem.

And also, like, the big-box stores (again, this is completely anecdotal), but, say, Costco here pays decent wages. It has the most diverse work force of anywhere I’ve seen in Santa Cruz. The same with the clientele. So it kind of depends on what you’re trying to get to. And then, one of the major businesses that was against the living wage campaign was a loved local store. Local businesses have often been started by local families that had assets to begin with. And in theory, a
large-scale business could distribute its proceeds to its shareholders. In theory, those shareholders could be a very diverse group of people. I know that isn’t how it really works, but it would be possible.

There’s just a certain xenophobia and provincialism about the local movement that I find a bit troubling.

**Rabkin:** Hmm. Interesting. So connected in some ways to this question of a local orientation versus a national one or a larger-scale one is the question of scale itself, and what the benefits and drawbacks are of relatively small farms and businesses as opposed to scaled-up ones. I spoke recently with the head of one of the very large, very successful organic produce businesses in our area, whose mission is to bring organic produce, certified organic produce to as many people as possible, using conventional supply chains and distribution and so forth, and has done that—and who said to me that organic, the whole idea of organic, and all the benefits of organic, is scale neutral. You can scale it up as big as you want without losing any of its value. And I’ve heard very different perspectives from smaller farmers, who see small scale as integral to not only the product they want to produce but also the relationships that they want to nurture as businesspeople as well as farmers. I wonder what your exploration into that question of scale has yielded.
Allen: I haven’t explored it per se. I think that on the question of organic, it really depends on what you think of as organic. If you’re talking about very close relationships, understanding exactly what’s going on in a particular place in your farm, if you want to really adhere to the ideals of organic which is a whole systems approach as compared to an input substitution, using organic pesticide instead of a synthetically compounded pesticide—those are questions that are really technical questions that have to do with what is organic. Certainly, there is something to be said about human-scale relationships. One of the things that CSA growers enjoy the most and CSA members enjoy the most is having a personal, human relationship with the person that’s either consuming the food or the person that is producing the food. There’s a psychological value there that really contributes to people’s quality of life. I think that’s very, very important to some people. I think it’s completely unimportant to other people. So it’s not really an either-or question, in my mind. It’s that we need a multiplicity of ways of doing things.

Some Key Individuals in the Sustainable Agriculture Movement

Rabkin: In your book Together at the Table you talk about what you call the crucial importance of key individuals in the history of social movements, and specifically in relation to movements around food justice and food systems. I’m wondering if we could switch gears a little bit and have you talk about some of the key individuals—farmers, activists, educators, researchers—who come to
mind for you when you contemplate the past several decades of change in agriculture and food systems.

**Allen**: Well, certainly, if we were to talk about the ways in which things have been shaped in the scholarship around sustainable food systems, one of the people I would put front and center is Fred Buttel, who was a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, an environmental sociologist, who brought an incredible wealth of scholarship and intellectual ability to asking some of the really hard questions around sustainability. I think he was very key.

I think Miguel Altieri, at UC Berkeley, is another important figure. Steve Gliessman here at UC Santa Cruz. There have been a number of these people that, even though it may seem like they’re sequestered at a university, have really made a big difference.

In terms of social movements, certainly Cesar Chavez changed the way a lot of people thought about the food system, and the unsung hero, Dolores Huerta. *Amazing* woman, who we don’t hear much about (this is one of those gender things). She was absolutely key, and continues to be involved in this.

These are people that—there may not be a lot of them, but they’re very, very crucial.
Robert Gottlieb, who’s at Occidental College, who in some ways brought people together to conceptualize the community food security movement, changed the way that people thought about food security in this country. That has spawned all kinds of organizations and all kinds of projects throughout the country.

Those are just a few of the ones that come immediately to mind, not being prepared for the question.

**Other CASFS Projects**

**Rabkin:** Great. Thank you. I know that you have a meeting coming up shortly. I’m wondering if there are any aspects of research being done at CASFS, or specifically the research you’ve done that we haven’t touched on, that you’d like to address before we stop.

**Allen:** I am finishing up a project with Clare Hinrichs at Penn State University on trying to understand local food, what excites people about local food. We’ve completed interviews of all the leaders of all the local food campaign projects in the United States. We’re just now getting the transcripts done for those. I will be doing a project locally that is going to be talking with growers, talking with consumers that participate in Buy Local. What is it that’s important to them about this? How do they see that it’s contributing to sustainability? I really want to understand what’s going on with that.
We’re starting a research project on the ways in which cooperative economic enterprises could affect gender equity in the food system. And we’re starting a project on the contributions of urban agriculture to food security and environmental sustainability.

**Rabkin:** What’s a cooperative economic enterprise?

**Allen:** A cooperative economic enterprise is one in which people make decisions together and they share a surplus together. There are a few of those, like real live examples. We’ll be talking to those people, and then speculating about what else could be done.

**Rabkin:** Can you give me an example of one?

**Allen:** Veritable Vegetable in San Francisco.

**Rabkin:** It’s a distribution company.

**Allen:** Right, exactly.

**Rabkin:** It’s been around for a while.

**Allen:** Woman-owned collective. Bu Nygrens is the head of that. And just trying to look at things in a different ways and find these little illuminations that are
doing things differently, have been successful, have made it happen. What have they done? And are there any rules that other people could follow that have the same kind of sensibilities and commitments to make things happen?

So that’s already way too many projects, [more] than I have time to do.

**Rabkin:** Anything else you’d like to add?

**Allen:** We’re on the verge of getting it right about the food system. Obviously, it’s not going to happen in the next two years or five years, but I think we’re increasingly interested in trying to ask the hard questions, in trying to get the right answers, and that people are interested, because food is the one thing that people do every single day. It’s the only commodity that people participate in, that they think about every single day. And it can be the medium for galvanizing broad interest in social justice and environment—more than anything else I can think of.

**Rabkin:** Thank you very much.

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1 See the oral history with Nesh Dhillon in this series.

2 The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (or CETA, Pub.L. 93-203) was a United States federal law enacted in 1973 to train workers and provide them with jobs in the public service. The program offered work to those with low incomes and the long-term unemployed as well as summer jobs to low-income high school students. In 1982 it was replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act.

3 ALBA began as the Rural Development Center in Salinas, California. See Jose Montenegro’s oral history in this series for more on this history, as well as the interviews with Rebecca Thistlethwaite, JP Perez, Florentino Collazo and Maria Luz Reyes, and Maria Inés Catalan.
See the oral history with Steve Gliessman in this series.
*Carol Shennan was unavailable to be interviewed for this project but was very supportive during its development.

 vi See the oral history with Sean Swezey in this series.


 Researchers interested in the history of the sustainable agriculture movement in California will find this article an important resource.

 ix See http://www.rocfund.org/ and also the oral histories with Steve Gliessman and Jim Cochran in this series. Both have been active with Roots of Change.

 x See http://www.growafarmer.org/

 xi See Gastronomica, Summer 2007, Volume 7 Number 3
 http://www.gastronomica.org/issues0703.html

 xi Allen is referring to the Strawberry Shortcake Festival and Food for Thought Forum sponsored by CASFS on Wednesday, May 20, 2009.

 http://repositories.cdlib.org/casfs/rb/brief_no9

 xiii See the oral histories with Nesh Dhillon, Catherine Barr, and Nancy Gammons in this series for more on the farmers’ markets of the Central Coast.

 xv See Arlie Russell Hochchild and Anne Machung (Penguin 2003).

 xvi See the oral history with Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farms in this series.

 xvii See Jan Perez and Patricia Allen (January 1, 2007), “Farming the College Market: Results of a Consumer Study at UC Santa Cruz” at http://repositories.cdlib.org/casfs/rb/

 xviii This oral history was conducted shortly after the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States.

 xix See the oral histories with Darrie Ganzhorn and Paul Glowaski of the Homeless Garden Project in this series.

 xx See “Fair Factor: A campaign to raise the minimum wage citywide sends shock waves through the local business community,” January 25-31, 2006 Metroactive
 http://www.metroactive.com/metro-santa-cruz/01.25.06/wage-0604.html

 xxi Patricia Allen, Together at the Table: Sustainability and Sustenance in the American Agrifood System (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

 xxii See http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0304/veggies.shtml]