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Philosophy in the Field

Care Ethics, Participatory Virtues, and Sustainability

LISSY GORALNIK, MATT FERKANY,
LAURIE THORP, AND KYLE POWYS WHYTE

Introduction

Ethics is an important dimension of environmental humanities. Ethics education lies at the center of the curriculum design, food production, and market decision making at the Student Organic Farm (sof) at Michigan State University. Students learn an ethic of care for and about animals, the farm ecosystem, and their food community. Recently we reflected on whether we should expand the ethics curriculum to also teach students skills for coping with situations in organic farming that involve multiple, often competing, values—situations many scholars refer to as *wicked* problems (Rittel and Webber 1973). We began to explore the possibilities of integrating the present ethic of care with a participatory ethics education designed to help students participate in deliberative processes and work effectively with others with different values under conditions that are physically, emotionally, and intellectually grueling.

This paper offers a humanities approach to experiential moral education aimed at preparing students to navigate values conflicts and challenging sustainability issues. At the heart of our approach is a blended care-based and character education pedagogy reflective of the kinds of character traits one might need to effectively engage these kinds of circumstances, what we refer to as participatory character (Ferkany and Whyte 2011). While our experiences and argumentation are rooted in the fields of the sof, the same ideas are rel-

Fig. 1. Michigan State University's SOF. Photo by author.

evant for any field-based natural resources or environmental learning where values-driven decision making, community participation, and environmental citizenship matter.

We begin by describing the history of the Organic Farmer Training Program (OFTP) and its care-based pedagogy. One of the key goals of an ethic of care in this context is for students to become more attentive to the relationships they inhabit near and far, on the farm and beyond, and to understand these relationships as ethically relevant. We then describe some of the wicked conditions that faculty and students at the farm experience, especially as they manifest as values conflicts. These stories illuminate the role of relationships at the farm and in the food system. They also demonstrate how the kinds of moral dilemmas our farm community faces might require participatory character for meaningful engagement and address. With an analysis of these examples, then, we intend to show how and why character education, or the cultivation of particular virtues in the learning process, complements a care-based pedagogy for sustainability education. Finally, we argue for the integration of an ethic of care with participatory character education in experiential environmental education to help faculty and students develop the skills and awareness necessary to effectively navigate wicked situations with grace and insight.

Fig. 2. Michigan State University's soF. Photo by author.

Fig. 3. Michigan State University's soF. Photo by author.

Context: The Student Organic Farm

The SOF is a ten-acre certified organic year-round teaching and production farm that began in 2000 as a student vision for an alternative to the large-scale production-focused curriculum in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Launched with grant funding and the help of several faculty members, the farm now operates an intensive nine-month OFTP, which focuses on diversified year-round production of organic vegetables, flowers, fruits, and herbs for local markets. The program emphasizes student learning in hands-on farm management and decision making coupled with the development of necessary farming skills and knowledge.

The farm uses twenty thousand square feet of passive solar greenhouses (hoop houses) for year-round vegetable production. In 2010 we marketed forty-eight thousand pounds of produce through our forty-eight-week community supported agriculture (CSA) membership, on-campus farm stand, and sales to campus dining halls. The farm creates learning opportunities for baccalaureate students through tours, experiential educational activities, and undergraduate research projects. Faculty and staff also provide outreach and extension programming for farmers and organizations both in rural and in urban areas to help them develop year-round local food production systems.

Students in the OFTP are agents in their own learning. They shape, evaluate, reinvent, and make meaning from and within their environment and experiences. For example, students develop and enact their own personal learning plans in consultation with the farm program educator, while also sharing the responsibility for a particular crop or field with another farmer and the responsibility for the CSA program, farm sales, and animals with the entire farm community. Alongside faculty and staff, the students collectively wrestle with daily decisions that have ecological, economic, and ethical consequences.

The Ethic of Care at the Student Organic Farm

Elder writes, "Love is where attentiveness to nature starts, and responsibility toward one's home landscape is where it leads" (1998, 11). This idea forms the basis for ethics education at the SOF. Care ethicists believe that our emotions, coupled with intellect and embodiment, are a source of moral guidance. If we view our interactions with others (humans,

Fig. 4. Newborn nursing. Photo by author.

nonhuman animals, and natural systems) as relationships we ought to inhabit with care and respect, and if we understand that these relationships ask of us certain responsibilities, then we might begin to perceive ethical action as the enactment of our responsibilities within all our relationships, near and far. When we work with others toward a shared goal, as we do daily on the farm, these responsibilities and relationships are concrete and embodied. Thus they provide an opportunity to engage an ethic of relationships and care on the ground in ways we might call upon to make empathetic leaps to more distant, indirect relationships (Plumwood 1991). For while many argue we need concrete relationships with other humans to learn how to inhabit care in context, they also emphasize that we can translate the feelings these relationships engender into relationships with nonhuman nature (Fien 1997; Mortari 2004; Noddings 1990). Being attentive to the needs of others with whom we are in relationship on the farm—individuals, human and nonhuman, and systems—through communication, observation, and emotional and physical engagement can serve this relationship maintenance.

While reciprocity is an important element of an ethic of care (Hoa-

Fig. 5. Preparing to clicker train in the field. Photo by author.

gland 1990; Noddings 1984), care need not be reciprocated in kind, which is important to consider when discussing relationships with nonhuman others and systems. Observing and responding to different kinds of care, though, requires a different kind of awareness than we often nurture in our everyday lives. The attentiveness and empathy we cultivate at the farm helps us understand how the pigs respond with joy or frustration to the care we give them, so we might better meet their needs, and also how they care for us in return. We attend to the health of the bees and respond with gratitude for their honey, run to the farm in a storm to calm the chickens, bring the farm cat into our homes on frigid nights, and let her distract us from our work when she wants love in the fields. We understand when to water, when to stay late to pull grubs from young plants, when to ask for help for a two-person task, and when to offer help before anyone asks. In the OFTP, students learn to respond emotionally to others as a community of interdependent members striving for a quality farm environment. Attentiveness guides our community's actions. This care-based approach to ethics is, at its core, different than most traditional ethics, which advocate deference to codes, lists of principles, and protocols for right action. Many of these ethical approaches are agent based; thus right action is deter-

mined by either the intentions or consequences of an individual moral agent's actions. Care ethics, on the other hand, are relationship based. Right action is determined by its impact on or intention to support relationships in context. While students at the SOF become proficient in the technical and scientific aspects of organic production, they are also encouraged to develop an ethic of care that might serve as a guide to moral conduct for farm work, market practices, and ethical eating.

The ethic of care is connected to both educational (Noddings 1984) and environmental (Warren 1990; Plumwood 1991) philosophy. Additionally, research in experiential education shows that allowing students to care for another being while interrogating the notion of caring, relationships, and responsibility can “develop the ethical disposition to care” (Mortari 2004, 109). In this way, the ethic of care is a guide to moral conduct and also a pedagogical tool. Adopting techniques like cooperative learning and noncompetitive grading, as well as modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings 2002), in the context of the farm, helps infuse the learning environment with care as an ethic and a practice. Thus the ethic of care is a meaningful foundation for an experiential environmental philosophical education. At the SOF, it guides our teaching, learning, growing, selling, and labor.

Care Ethics and Character Education

While students learn to inhabit and promote the flourishing of relationships in the course of their training at the SOF, we hope also they cultivate character traits that will enable them to be effective and attentive environmental citizens off the farm in a variety of contexts. We are, then, proposing a kind of character education, often tied to the development of particular virtues, through a care-based pedagogy. Scholars have argued both that care ethics is a form of virtue ethics (Slote 2010a, 2010b)—caring being one of many important virtues one ought to develop to cultivate a moral character—and also that care ethics is incompatible with virtue ethics or character education because of the emphasis on relationships rather than individual moral agency (Noddings 2002). This tension between virtue ethics and the ethic of care is a persistent conversation in ethics dialogue, which we appreciate and understand. We do not think the two approaches are incompatible, though; nor do we think they are the same thing. Instead, we see an opportunity to reconcile the two in an educational context by advocating

here for a blend of care ethics and character education for experiential environmental learning.

The cultivation of certain character traits (virtues) through experiences in a care-based learning environment is a meaningful educational outcome, given the centrality of relationships to the virtues we are most interested in—for example generosity, reasonableness, and humility. These are caring characteristics that can guide students in caring relationships on and off the farm. Despite the historical tendency to cast care pedagogy and character education as competing approaches, we see this blend of the two approaches to moral education as philosophically consistent for the following reasons. First, we endorse a pluralistic normative ethics in which an imperative to care for others (or “build, maintain, and enhance caring relationships”) is one very weighty but not clearly the sole moral imperative (contrary to Slote 2007). More importantly, we view character education as just what happens when people acquire the virtues of interest to us, since having a virtue is ipso facto to have certain character traits. We understand character education to be flexible in this way, versus some traditional approaches to character education, which may contain elements that conflict with a care-based pedagogy (e.g., Lickona). One feature of some traditional approaches we take issue with is their agent-centeredness, or their neglect of the ways in which moral growth occurs in and through caring relationships and supporting institutional structures (Noddings 2002). In this way, we are proposing educational experiences that develop particular character traits—character education—in the context of a care-based, relationship-focused moral education. The goal is that students learn not just farming techniques and environmental principles but also how to be effective, engaged, and empathetic environmental citizens and participants in relationships with people, beings, places, ideas, and systems.

Organic Farming and Wicked Problems

Small-scale organic farming is one way to work on behalf of more sustainable regional and global food systems. The complex challenges of creating sustainable food systems are of the same class of problems as, and in fact directly related to, other pervasive social and ecological issues scholars often refer to as wicked problems, including hunger, climate change, and water availability (Korhonen and Seager 2008; Norton 2005; Thompson 2010).

Fig. 6. Field trip to Michigan State University's Swine Teaching and Research Center. Photo by author.

When a problem is wicked, there is widespread disagreement over how to formulate the problem and how to design potential solutions; there can be disagreement about which fundamental questions best capture the dynamics of the problem, which steps best work toward its address, or which measures best indicate a successful solution. Consider the problem of developing sustainable food systems. If one formulates the issue as an economic question, then the possible solutions involve subsidies, incentives, and other economic measures that address a certain conception of economic problems. But if one formulates it as a question of nutritional intake, social justice, agroecological integrity, public health, water quality, climate, or animal welfare, different possible solutions arise. These multiple solutions may complement or contradict each other; thus solving one element of the problem might complicate the other elements, which makes evaluating progress potentially overwhelming. The almost infinite problem formulations and questions reflect stakeholders' cultures, training, socioeconomic status, expecta-

Fig. 7. Delivering gestating sows to the SOF. Photo by author.

tions, and background knowledge. They also reflect the dynamic nature of these problems, which are characterized by things like changing weather patterns, resource availability, and market volatility.

Policies or strategies for working toward sustainability will have consequences that are hard to reverse; any failures will likely have serious and deeply felt impacts on people, animals, and landscapes. And sustainable food production cannot be separated from other wicked problems. That is, sustainable food production is also a climate change, water quality, and biodiversity issue. These are nested and compounding problems; their solutions, as well as their impacts, are interdependent and related.

The wicked problems framework has implications for experiential education at the SOF. Future organic farmers must understand the ethics of working under wicked conditions. They will have to work with certifiers, food code regulations, buyers, butchers, neighbors, and other farmers who may have different expectations for sustainable farming or who are not interested in sustainability at all. Fatigue, frustration, interpersonal conflict, and physical discomfort will pervade these interactions. To work collectively toward the development of more just and sustainable food systems, ethics education for wicked problems must emphasize the development of the skills needed to work with others

Fig. 8. Directors of the oftp and Michigan State University's Swine Teaching and Research Center. Photo by author.

who have different ethics, come from different backgrounds, and have been trained in different disciplines. This education must also cultivate the empathy necessary to inhabit this role with grace and care for all actors in the system and a sense of responsibility to apply these skills as engaged citizens. In what follows, we will describe some challenging interactions and opportunities for learning we have experienced through our teaching and learning at the sof.

Pigs on Pasture: Caring across Boundaries

Four years ago we set out to offer students an alternative method of pork production not currently present on campus that expressed our sense of care for animals and the environment. We wondered: Can we raise pigs as food animals in ways that honor our moral obligations both to individuals and to collectives, to the animals, laborers, and the land? How might we raise pigs in a way that allows them to fully express their pigness (Rollins 1995); that respects their lives, as well as their deaths; and that provides a quality of life for the animals aligned with our vision of welfare and good husbandry?

It was not easy to get these fine animals to our farm, since all animal use on our campus is tightly controlled and regulated by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Further, the faculty and staff affiliated with the farm were ethical eaters who saw an important role for pigs in the farm ecosystem, but none of us had swine production expertise. We were committed to this project, though; so we contacted the campus swine extension specialist, a professor of animal science.

His response to a meeting request was a pleasant surprise, for clear divisions separate our campus: conventional and organic, intensive and extensive, animal scientist and social scientist, industrial scale and small scale. But our colleague was curious about what “extensive” (organic or pasture-based husbandry systems) and “intensive” (large-scale, concentrated) production systems might learn from each other; and he is a boundary crosser, open to the possibility for learning across the chasm that divides us. By putting a face on what we considered the industrial paradigm, this colleague troubled our simplistic notions of intensive animal agriculture and created an opening for dialogue. His grace in navigating the challenges of the system, as well as his friendship, has made this a deeply valuable collaboration.

After connecting with our animal-science colleague, it took another six months to prepare, submit, revise, and garner approval for our proposal from IACUC and the Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA), which then had to be approved by a faculty expert for its “scientific and educational merit.” In completing this paperwork, it became clear we were navigating a world of vastly different ethical frameworks. Although designed with the intent to protect animal health and wellbeing, the institutional standards for animal welfare were quite different from our own. Theirs is a world of scientific measures with prescriptive protocols to protect biological or physiological health, whereas ours included interspecies empathetic awareness attuned to animal affect and telos (Rollins 1995). How does one account for daily love or empathy in a standard operating procedure? All participating investigators, students, and staff who would work with the animals were required to successfully complete Michigan State University’s general medical health questionnaire along with the following IACUC tutorials: (1) Species Specific (swine), (2) Occupational Safety for Animal Handlers, (3) General Animal Care and Handling, and (4) Biosafety Principles for Animal Users. There was no tutorial for love.

Fig. 9. Pig love. Photo by author.

What we detailed in our IACUC project description was a study to develop the management strategies employed (herd movement, housing, field rotations, and grazing preferences) for the successful integration of pigs into a diverse cropping system. However, once the animals arrived, our study quickly grew into something much larger; the presence of the pigs catalyzed inquiry into human and animal interactions, student experiential learning outcomes, landscape health and swine behavior, overcoming supply-chain barriers, and expanding a local niche market for sustainably produced pork. Students from multiple majors along with fifteen students in our OFTP are responsible for the daily care of the animals. Graduate students from the Departments of Anthropology, Sociology, and Fisheries and Wildlife have also participated in data collection and the care of the animals.

We as co-learners all come with a nuanced construction of what good animal husbandry coupled with sustainable farming should encompass. These constructions are not static; they change with the season, weather, stress of the day, and a seemingly infinite number of confounding variables. We are constantly adapting our practices and protocol, and this can be

Fig. 10. Pig play on a hot day. Photo by author.

confusing territory for both teacher and learner. Competing values are encountered within our farm community and in our interactions with the regulatory arms of the university. Even after three years in the field with the pigs, our learning about how best to provide daily supplemental feed, water without creating wallows, shelter without soil compaction, good care for the animals without overburdening the farm crew, adequate space without compromising crop production, and manure management continues to develop. All these management questions bring us together as an agrarian community of practice. We experiment, fail, succeed, adjust, and observe. Notes of joy, frustration, and query are posted on our farm whiteboard, jotted on the pig clipboard, sent via e-mail, and shared in consultation during weekly farm walks.

These challenges and joys are not restricted to the management of the pigs. Finding a small-scale, USDA-certified processor is one of the biggest hurdles facing niche market meat producers in the United States, due to consolidation of animal agriculture. Michigan has only a handful of small-scale processors left in the state, and hauling live animals more than one hour away is a welfare concern. And there are roadblocks for

Fig. 11. Loading the pigs for processing. Photo by author.

Fig. 12. Barn time with a gestating sow. Photo by author.

the small-scale farmer at every step of the process of birthing, raising, slaughtering, selling, and eating agricultural animals. Last year, our animal-science colleague spent hours working with our campus food procurement director to wade through food code regulations regarding proper labeling, transport, and handling of meat for resale. This was tedious work requiring patience, commitment, and flexibility—character traits that serve small-scale farmers well but are not often emphasized in farming or environmental education. As a result of his work, we have developed a productive, collegial relationship with the director of procurement for Michigan State University's Food Stores, a meaningful contact in our local food system. This is just one example of the many interdisciplinary, cross-paradigm relationships this project has enabled.

Perhaps the most salient demonstration of the capacity of farm experiences to understand and address competing value stances arose when we sought organic certification for our pork last winter. To meet certification standards, the sows (who would birth the piglets we would raise) needed to spend the last third of their gestation in an organic system, which meant we could not raise conventional feeder piglets, as we had done before. So we brought two six hundred-pound sows, whom we named Honey and Ruby, out of the campus confinement system to the sof in February and successfully farrowed eighteen live piglets over five days in April. To protect the piglets from crushing (a common occurrence in the first forty-eight hours after birth when farrowing crates—restrictive metal enclosures approximately eight feet by three feet—are not used), we scheduled pairs of students to monitor the sows and their piglets around the clock. After a particularly challenging farrowing with Ruby, then four to five nights without sleep followed by full workdays, the instructor engaged in a conversation with two students about what we might do differently next year. Somewhat surprisingly, they discussed an understanding of the role of, and an openness to, the use of farrowing crates, which are standard practice in confined-animal agriculture systems but are often problematic for animal-welfare advocates. The students wondered: *Do we want to consider using these next year? Are crates even allowed with organic certification? Could we use them for just two nights to allow us to get some sleep? Are other technologies available?* After physically caring for the sows and litters during birthing, the students, previously adamantly against the use of farrowing crates, were able to discuss with sophistication the potential value of the technology

Fig. 13. Intensive system farrowing. Photo by author.

Fig. 14. soF farrowing. Photo by author.

both for farmers and for pigs. They developed empathy for the complexity of farm situations and for the actors in the wider system, beyond a theoretical attachment to a particular practice. The physical challenges and labor costs of our system convinced them that there may not be one right way to farrow sows but that farm practices might be context dependent. This is a learning outcome directly connected to farm experience that captures the kinds of skills and awareness that might be necessary to address wicked problems if nurtured in the right ways.

In our years of raising pigs at the farm, we have learned that many things we wanted to do associated with selling and consuming our pork were illegal according to campus, state, and federal food safety regulations. However, we value all our challenges along the way as openings for critical learning. The regulatory hurdles, day-to-day frustrations, and emotional complexities of loving and killing and consuming the animals we labor for and with are all important elements of learning on the farm. They require the ability to dialogue; to remain open to unfamiliar, perhaps even contrary, ideas; to adapt to changing conditions; to abandon one's own agenda to support the needs of the community or the lives of dependent animals, while also clinging to one's values in the face of challenge; to plan for the future and react in the moment; and to find joy in the cycles of the farm and the natural world.

Virtues Development and the Farm Learning Experience

Students and faculty at the farm routinely confront a variety of complex realities and ethical dilemmas. Some simply challenge the participants' individual values about food choices. Other dilemmas also require students to solve problems related to multiple dimensions of sustainable agriculture and the management of wicked problems. Because of this tangible experience in the midst of complex problems, the Michigan State University *sof*, and other outdoor experiential venues like it, might constitute a model testing ground to understand what it takes to educate developing citizens with the skills needed to address values conflicts.

To stay engaged in deliberative, decision-making processes, people must be dependable, generous with their time, patient, and resilient as they deal with others. They also need to care enough about the dignity and interests both of themselves and of others to be reasonable and fair, empathetic, temperate, and humble. To cope with wicked problems, then, citizens likely need particular skills and character traits. They also

Fig. 15. Preparing to observe slaughter and processing. Photo by author.

Fig. 16. Debrief and dialogue after Swine Teaching and Research field trip. Photo by author.

need to make certain commitments to the development and maintenance of relationships with animals, the land, their communities, and natural systems, to act on behalf of what they value in caring ways.

We can look to humility and reasonableness as examples of how these virtues function in the kind of relationship building necessary to address wicked problems. In group deliberative contexts, Aikin and Clanton define humility as “the willingness to hold one’s view fallibly and in such a way as to admit that one might be shown wrong in light of better reasons, evidence, and argument” (2010, p. 11). It is flanked by vices of deliberative hubris, or an “unwillingness to even consider that one’s view could be refined or refuted by others,” and deliberative insecurity, or “the inability to think that one could ever be on target about an issue.” So understood, deliberative humility is crucial for collective management of wicked problems in at least two ways. The deliberations of people who have the virtue will tend to be more inclusive than those characterized by deliberative hubris. Consequently, these participants enable the consideration of a wider diversity or greater depth of views and so facilitate the sort of community building needed to manage wicked problems with other participants whose views they might not necessarily share.

An example of the kind of learning that might foster deliberative humility in the context of the farm occurred when a student farmer was confounded by an e-mail she received from a CSA member who was evidently sympathetic to animal rights views. The CSA member responded to the sor’s presale announcement by writing, “What is the purpose of ‘humane farming’ if the ultimate purpose is to slaughter the animal?” The student farmer passed the message on to her instructor and said, “Got this question/response from a CSA member and don’t have the energy to respond . . . perhaps you have something to say in response?” We can only conjecture what the student took away from this interaction. But it is interesting that the student was neither simply dismissive nor thoughtlessly confrontational, especially since she had devoted extensive emotional and physical energy to the pigs’ care for six months. Her claim to lack the energy to respond could be evidence of frustration, sensitivity to the philosophical complexity of the issue, or simply an end-of-the-day exhaustion. Regardless, we can see here an opportunity to engage in the sort of reciprocal dialogue (a central focus of care-based learning) we might expect from deliberatively humble (an

Fig. 17. Michigan State University's SOF campus farm stand. Photo by author.

important character trait for deliberative processes) persons who disagree about something important. To respond well, the student would need to articulate her position clearly but also understand, even empathize with, the CSA member's point of view while carefully interrogating her own. The deliberative process is as much about listening as it is about sharing. Nurturing the student's ability to communicate and act with humility in the face of contradictory views, while integrating discussions about participatory character and engaged citizenship into the curriculum, is one way we might help students cultivate the skills and traits necessary for an ethic of relationship building and flourishing. This animal welfare confrontation is a micro example of a macro issue in sustainable agriculture; thus it is a way for the students to practice in place the kinds of dialogue, engagement, and actions on behalf of natural systems they might need to take into their beyond-farm lives.

The deliberations of humble people are also likely to be more productive than those led, or rather *not* led, by those who are simply insecure. Insecure actors might fail to engage, to contribute to deliberations meaningfully, or to contribute at all (e.g., by suggesting how a proposal

Fig. 18. Caring for a sow after a difficult birth. Photo by author.

can be refined or suggesting a new line of inquiry). So deliberative humility is important both for the inclusiveness of deliberations and for sustained engagement in them.

Like humility, the virtue of reasonableness also serves to promote both the inclusiveness of deliberations and sustained engagement in them. Reasonableness is a willingness to cooperate on fair terms and advance fair proposals (Rawls 1993). Unreasonableness (an unwillingness to cooperate on fair terms or advance fair proposals) is the corresponding vice. To understand this vice in context, it is informative to consider two different forms it might inhabit.

First, unreasonableness might take the form of an egoistic vice of intransigence, or an unwillingness to compromise one's interests whatever the costs to others. This kind of heel dragging does not work in the farm environment. For example, a particular farmer's demand to move the pigs to a different pasture on his or her own schedule might conflict with the conditions of the fields, the needs of the pigs, crop scheduling, the demands of the consumer system, the weather, or available labor. Second, unreasonableness might take the form of an altruistic vice of obsequiousness, or a willingness to compromise one's interests, however fundamental, for the benefit of others. This might look like a

Fig. 19. Two-day-old piglet. Photo by author.

farmer who never objects to others' plans or community agenda setting, even when those plans conflict with his or her interests or ideas about the farm's or community's needs. Both of these examples of unreasonableness would impact deliberations negatively, either by holding up progress or not contributing to meaningful progress. Conversely, the deliberations of reasonable people are more likely to be inclusive because no single member's needs are elevated above group needs. Simi-

larly, reasonable people are more likely to stay engaged and keep others engaged. Of course, they might want to flee in resignation when confronted with unreasonable people, a reaction that other deliberative virtues like patience or resilience might temper, but this is a separate issue.

Some of the experiences students have had with the pigs at the SOF arguably provided additional object lessons in humility and reasonableness. Perhaps the most obvious example is the students' experience farrowing the piglets without crates. The students that came to question their prior beliefs about the morality of farrowing crates (above) exhibited a newfound humility, about this issue at least. This humility is likely the sort one would need to deliberate inclusively with others who want to make a career of pork production and either see no problem with farrowing crates or accept them as a necessary element of large-scale production systems. As a consequence, the experience may also have given the students a new capacity for reasonableness in such deliberations. Having discovered how their views about the morality of farrowing crates could be mistaken or in need of refinement, it seems likely they would be more willing to cooperate on fair terms and advance fair proposals. Using this situation as a case study for discussion either in the moment or later in the education process is one way we might nurture the development of the kinds of character traits necessary for deliberation about wicked problems.

Conclusion

That students are confronted with the sorts of experiences described in the previous section is evidence that educational farms—and other similar field-based learning environments—have the capacity to be fertile teaching grounds for ethics education. In collaboratively producing food and making values-based decisions about how best to act in, with, and on behalf of the land, students confront situations that ask them to question and refine some of their more recalcitrant beliefs and understand in context their obligations to individuals and systems. Interfacing with the public can have the same impact; these interactions might also further challenge them to learn how to articulate their views to diverse others, while remaining open to multiple and competing views. This values engagement and communication can be practiced and learned in the field.

It is also the case that the character traits needed for participating in

Fig. 20. Snacks in the field. Photo by author.

the collective management of wicked problems have a deep connection to the ethic of care or can best be learned in a context of care. It is difficult to imagine collective efforts to manage such problems succeeding when participants do not care enough either about the process to stay deeply engaged or about themselves and others enough to engage it inclusively or empathetically, or to commit to the maintenance and flourishing of the myriad relationships they depend on and engage in the course of their work. Care-based pedagogy can be complimented by education in participatory character, and together they can prepare students for deliberative processes and meaningful participation in challenging sustainability issues. Future work should strive to better understand and explain how field-based education can develop and assess experiences that promote care and participatory character.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lissy Goralnik is an environmental scholar, writer, ethicist, and educator. A postdoctoral scholar at Oregon State University in the Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, she researches field philosophy, which is place-based, experiential environmental inquiry that facilitates interdisciplinary understanding of the natural world, the cultivation of knowledge and critical awareness to

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Matt Ferkany is an assistant professor in the Departments of Teacher Education and Philosophy at Michigan State University. His work focuses on political, ethical, and pedagogical problems relating to environmental ethics and education, civic and moral education, and well-being and virtue. He is currently working on a project funded by the Spencer Foundation on environmental education linking character, democratic education, and environmental virtue ethics. His work has been published in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *Environmental Values*, *Theory and Research in Education*, the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, and the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*.

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