

# ARE THERE ROLES FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS IN SMALL COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS?

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# Overview

- Introduction
- Definition: community food systems
- Impetus for research
- Is this material appropriate for technical communicators?
- Determining documentation: 3 approaches
- Opportunities for involvement
- Conclusion
- Questions

# Introduction

- Technical Communication related to agriculture
  - Research is sparse
  - Available examples are sparse...for this project
- Heavy Equipment
- “TC”

# A Community Food Systems is...

- “food production, processing, distribution, and consumption...integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place. A community food system can refer to a relatively small area, such as a neighborhood, or progressively larger areas—towns, cities, counties, regions, or bioregions” (Eames-Sheavly and Wilkins 2012)
- Urban focus

# City Gardens

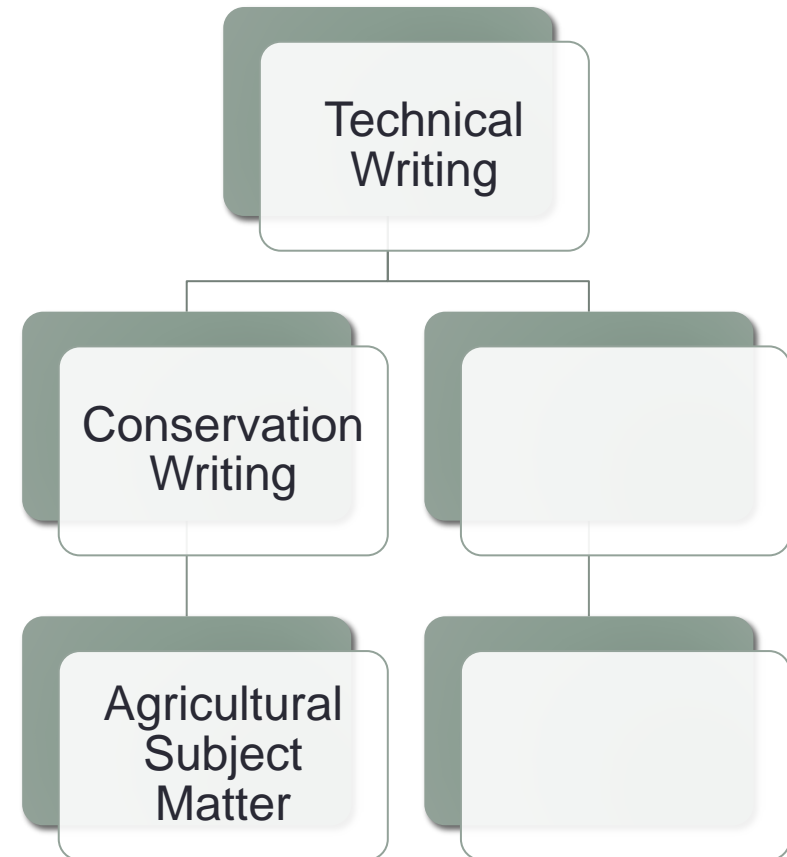
- Chefs farming on rooftop of the Conrad Hotel
- Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan
  - 250,000 bees have taken up residence in manmade hives
  - Part of a larger effort to plant one million trees in the next decade
  - Pollinators
  - Honey
- Bronx housing project
  - Roof top: now a greenhouse
  - Food goes to co-op
- Food Distribution Center in the Bronx
  - 200,000 square foot farm...on the roof
  - RFP: they need a farmer and the support to make it happen

# Berkeley Food System

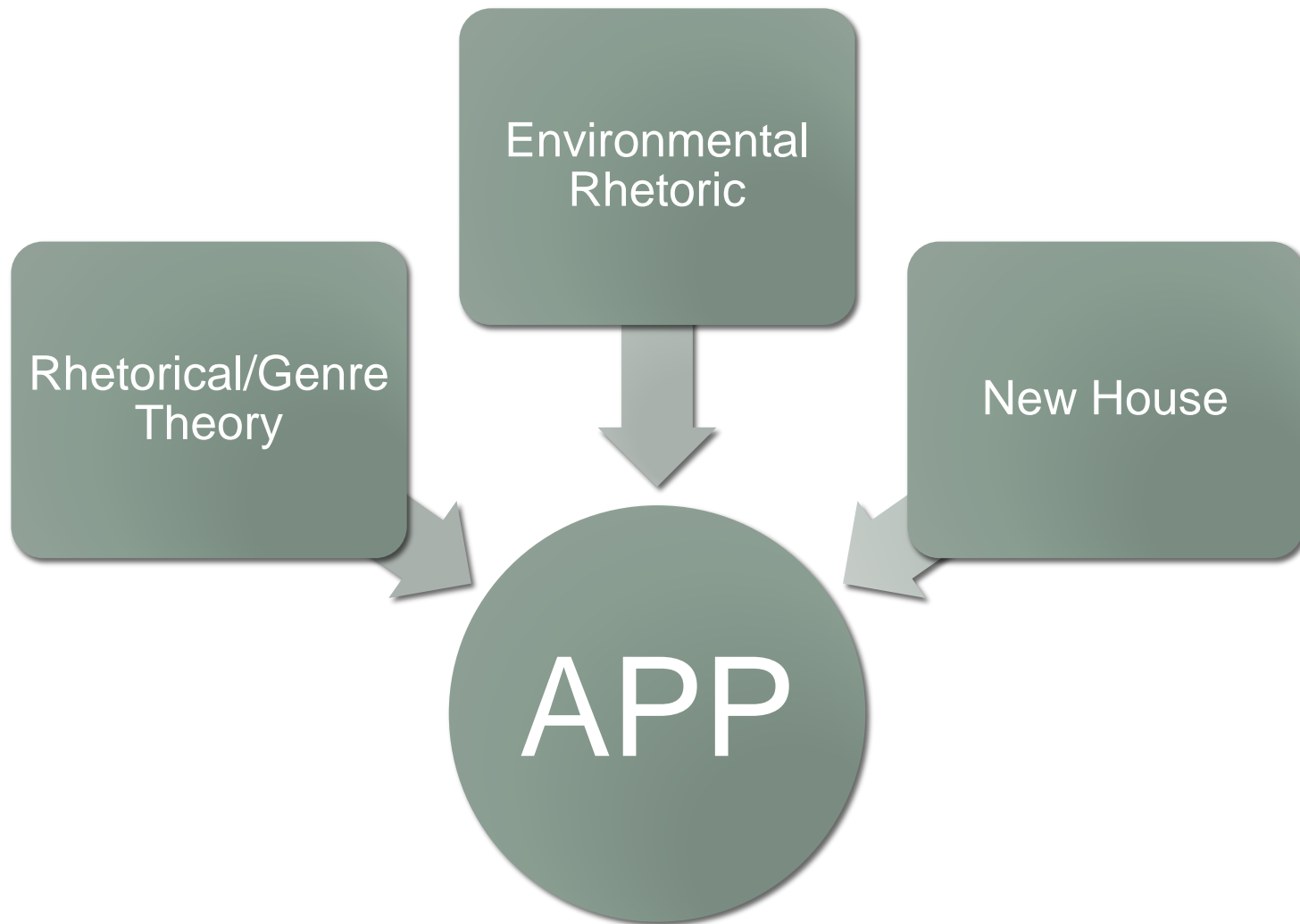
- Gardens on school grounds
- Organic food integrated into school meal programs
- Curricula: food-system-oriented
- Food council: a part of the city of Berkeley
- Memo of Understanding w/ city health department
- Creation of Food System Shows Pattern
  - Idea
  - Sharing the idea
  - Put into writing (civil policy, curricula, district policy, etc)
  - Monetary Support

# Material Appropriate for TCs?

- Johnson-Sheehan and Morgan: “Conservation Writing: An Emerging Field in Technical Communication” (2009)
- Technical/scientific
- Advocacy for action
- Genres of Conservation Writing
  - Pamphlets
  - Construction Projects
  - Environmental Impact Statements



# Impetus





# My Situation

- Zero: my experience growing food
- Zero: number of relationships with knowledgeable people
- Zero: easily accessible community resources to help me

# Unique Perspective: Technical Communicator

- How can I enable the action?
- Technical Communication...can lead to action (Katz 1992)
- Enable participation in a community food system
- APP is exploration of opportunities to participate

# Of Note for TCs: Characteristics of Community Food Systems

- Knowledge and training, rather than industrialization
  - Non-SME (or non-farmer) participation
  - Extension Services
  - SAREP (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program)
  - City Farmer News
- Community scholarship tied to action
  - SAREP
  - UC Davis
- Involvement of multiple SMEs with non-SMEs
  - Philosophers, sociologists, economists, civil leaders, non-SMEs, farmers, agricultural specialists

# Examining TC Theory

- Transmission of information
  - Copying verbatim from an extension service employee, farmer, master gardener, or SME
- Translation of information
  - ...to language accessible by non-scientists or to collect data and draft a grant proposal to secure funding.
- **Articulation of information**
  - **Articulate comprehensive versions of new food systems to various participants in those food systems (Doak, Miller, and Slack 1993)**

# Examining TC Theory

- Trying to create new community food systems where they do not exist
  - City
  - Urban environment

These different members of a community are all seeking an unconventional or previously nonexistent idea to be put into action; it could become a technical communicator's role to constitute that vision by reconciling the necessary pieces of disparate technical data into **descriptions of the new food system.**

# Three Approaches

- Documents based on user roles, rhetorical situations, genres
- Documents based on system requirements
  - Gail Feenstra's Four Spaces required for community food systems
- Combining the two

# Defined by Documentation/User Groups

- Example: [Green Bluff Growers](#)
  - 40+ individual growers
  - U-pick
  - Agri-tourism & helping farmers w/various marketing techniques
- Customers (or non-SMEs)
  - Pamphlets or newsletters
  - Website
- Civil officials & city planners
  - Environmental impact statements, natural resource inventories
  - Policies, laws, memorandum of understandings
- Farming SMEs, other SMEs, & gardeners
  - Instrumental discourse, manuals
  - Agreement on vision of food system
  - Extension service products

# Gail Feenstra's 4 "Spaces"

- In addition to seeds, soil, land, etc
- Four types of "space" are needed
  - Intellectual
  - Social
  - Political
  - Economic
- TCs can have roles in each of these



# Building a Theoretical Community Food System

- Population: 10,790
- Location: Eastern Washington
- Climate: Desert (base of the Rockies)
- Food production: Dry land hay crops
- Extension service: Washington State University
  
- Vision
  - City-sponsored food garden
  - Neighborhood garden/market/food swap

# Intellectual Space

- The creation of ideas
- Knowledge/information: [SAREP](#), WSU Extension
- Inspiration by example: [City Farmer News](#)

# Intellectual Space – What can I contribute?

- Build the idea and document it
- Extension service: single source of knowledge
- Reciprocally improve extension service products and increase my own knowledge
  - They can help improve my food system, and
  - I can help improve their documents

# Social Space

- 3 farmer's markets within fifteen miles
- 40 small farms within thirty-five miles
- Relationship with master gardener
- Relationship with nursery
- Relationship with homesteading store
- 4 local families who grow their own food (not farmers)
- Church organization: outdoor community service projects (free)

# Social Space – What can I contribute?

- A single source that lists all local farmer's markets
- People unaware of who grows their own food
- People unaware of...
  - Master gardener
  - Church program
  - City Farmer News
  - CSAs
  - Local extension service
  - Local markets
- If I build (a website), they will come...
  - Number of people growing their own food
  - Links to resources that enable food systems

# Political Space in my Community

- Document the food system; make it official
- City council meetings time/location
  - Reviewed city project proposals and construction projects
  - Gaining a sense of the town's priorities (cater rhetorical appeals)
- Support: policy, finances, city land
- What if city doesn't offer support?
- Allows social connections, information sharing

# Political Space – What can I contribute?

- Preference: Support from town leaders
- Author or co-author Environmental Impact Statements
- If not: town newsletter or website
  - Website, pamphlet, news article, phone number, link
  - Inform gardeners, farmers, and consumers: official policy might not exist
  - Community food system might exist as friendly relationships between a few citizens and the local food bank or homeless shelter.

# Economic Space

- Every project needs it
- SAREP might help w/USDA funding
- Foundationcenter.org - funding community development
- Kickstarter.com – food related projects
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education ([Sare.org](http://Sare.org)) - Agriculture projects in various communities



# Economic Space – What can I contribute?

- Grants
- Rhetorical Expertise
  - Logos
  - Pathos
  - Ethos

# TC Participation: Feasible

- Further research:
  - Participation in community food system where a technical communicator employ his or her skills
  - Gather data: how extension service employees design their products for users
    - Who has the manual for rooftop farming?
    - Who has the manual for urban beekeeping?
  - Is it better to address agricultural documents from the perspective of users, or from a structure determined by agricultural experts, ie
    - Customers, farmers, civil leaders, etc
    - Feenstra's intellectual, social, political, economic spaces

# Thank you

- Dr. MacKenzie
- Dr. Tesdell

# Questions?

- Doak, Jeffry, David James Miller, and Jennifer Daryl Slack. "The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 1993: 12-36.
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