Handpicked: Stories from the Field

Season 1, Episode 6: “We Are All Shepherds of the Data”: Food, Tech and Data Sovereignty

Featuring a conversation with Theresa Schumilas

# **Transcript**

**Speakers**

Amanda Di Battista: **AD**

Laine Young: **LY**

Theresa Schumilas: **TS**

{[Birds chirping and leaves rustling]}

**LY**: You’ve likely purchased food from a smaller scale farmer or producer at a farmers’ market, through a CSA, or directly from a farm or shop. But have you ever wondered how smaller scale farmers and food producers connect with consumers online? On this episode of *Handpicked: Stories from the Field*, we’ll talk to a farmer who has spent a lot of time thinking about digital food markets, and how digital platforms can contribute to food sovereignty.

{[Intro Music]}

**AD**: Hello, welcome to the 6th and final episode in the first season of *Handpicked*. I’m Amanda Di Battista

**LY**: and I’m Laine Young, and today we’ll be talking about food and technology.

**AD**: What kind of food technology? Like, self-driving food delivery trucks?

**LY**: No! While, the ways that people farm and distribute food are changing because of advances in machinery, that’s not the kind of technology that we’re talking about here. In this episode, we’ll look at Open Food Network: an open-source platform that enables farmers and food producers to connect with different markets.

**AD**: That sounds cool. Tell me what an ‘open-source platform’ is though.

**LY**: Sure, in a nutshell, a digital platform is made up of code—all the bits of information that make a website, database, or in the case of the Open Food Network - an online food market. When a platform is open source, all of the code is owned by everyone. We’ll get into the nitty gritty a little later in the episode, but Open Food Network is a really great example of a digital commons.

**AD**: Okay, I get it, like a publicly owned digital space. But what does a ‘digital commons’ have to do with food?

**LY**: That’s a great question. And, to answer it, I spoke to Theresa Schumilas, a flower farmer here in the Waterloo region, and the director of Open Food Network Canada. Theresa has been involved with the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems as a researcher and postdoctoral fellow. Theresa and I talked about why she considers digital sovereignty as key to food sovereignty.

**AD**: And by ‘food sovereignty,’ you mean people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate, sustainably produced food, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems, right?

**LY**: Exactly. You may have heard the term ‘food sovereignty’ in discussions around sustainable food systems, but it’s important to know that the term comes from a farmer’s organization in the global south called, La Via Campesina. La Via Campesina coordinates peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities, and advocates for family-farm-based sustainable agriculture. La Via Campesina works on projects that defend farmers’ seeds, stops violence against women, recognizes the rights of peasants, and campaigns for agrarian reform at the global level.

**AD**: Oh wow, that’s incredible.

**LY**: It really is. And I think it’s especially interesting to see how the ideals of food sovereignty have been adapted in different ways to different contexts.

**AD**: Even in the digital context.

**LY**: That's right! So that's why, last summer, I took a trip out to Theresa’s flower farm in St. Agatha, to pick her brain about how platforms like Open Food Network, which prioritize justice, access, and sharing over profit, can help us to build the food systems we want. But I’ll let Theresa introduce herself.

**TS**: My name is Theresa Schumilas. I'm a retired academic, and an activist in food systems and now in technology, and I am a small-scale cut-flower grower in Southwest Ontario. For most of my life, for 30 years I grew organic vegetables and ran a community-supported agriculture project, sometimes full time, sometimes part time, just depending on what else was going on in my life. And then a few years ago, I thought I was going to retire from farming, and realized that I just couldn't quite do it. And, but I needed a change, and so, I switched to growing cut flowers as a little retirement project and that grew and grew and grew and now it's actually quite a big operation.

**LY**: So, I started by asking Theresa a question about scale. I was curious to know if smaller scale farmers and food producers face different challenges than larger scale operations. She outlined three main differences: access to the supply chain, changing consumer demands, and production management. Here’s Theresa with more.

**TS**: The first thing that always comes to mind is the issue of access to what we have come to call supply chain. So, what has, with sort of consolidation, economic consolidation, scale consolidation, supply chains are very inflexible. You have to be a certain scale, you have to be a certain size, your product has to be of a certain quality, it has to be of a certain price point, et cetera, et cetera. And that inflexibility is incompatible with smaller land-based scale farming. It can't really work for small and medium size producers. They can't capture power in those so-called value chains. So, that's a problem. I think that the second problem is, we are in a time of changing consumer demands. Consumers really want it all. You know, when I first started as a CSA, those shares sold themselves. They really did. People were, there was a small group of very committed consumers. In the, I'm talking about the mid-eighties and early nineties, who were very worried about, I don't think they were saying food sovereignty, but that was what they were worried about. And they wanted a relationship with their food, and with their food growers and they would, they would right away pay for that. And now, it's harder and harder to sell CSA shares, right? People, consumers, want choice, and they want cheap, and even the consumers who really also want to know where their food comes from and want to support ecological production, so forth and many, many do. They still want it cheap, and they really want it convenient. And all of those things, those consumer demands, are really hard for small-scale farmers to meet.

And I think the last thing, and maybe it goes without saying, is the actual production management is like next to impossible. The kind of learning curves and knowledge management that has to happen for small-scale farmers, and in systems where we just do not have a, you know, a great deal of extension support or outreach support from academics, or from government, for the small-scale farmers, they tend to be overlooked by those systems. And so, it's really hard to just find scale-appropriate information for the production of anything. So yeah, that's the third challenge.

**AD**: Okay, I can see how managing products and supply chains, and trying to respond to consumer demands could be a significant challenge for smaller scale farmers and producers. But I heard a term in there that’s may be unfamiliar—what’s a CSA?

**LY**: A CSA is Community Supported Agriculture, here’s Theresa with more.

**TS**: Community Supported Agriculture is a, is a food sharing kind of model, where people buy a share in a farm and then pick up their dividend as a harvest share every week. And so, they make a commitment to take all of their, sometimes it's vegetables, it can be bread, it could be meat, could be dairy, it could be anything, from a particular farmer, and so, it shares the risk with that farmer, risk of the harvest.

**AD**: Oh okay! So, you’ve got a Community Supported Agriculture share right?

**LY**: Yeah, I love my CSA share from Fertile Ground Farms- also in St. Agatha. Not only do I get a box of amazing, locally-grown produce, but I’m also part of a community of people that are learning about local food.

{[Short Music Break]}

Given the challenges for smaller-scale farmers and producers that Theresa had outlined, I asked her to tell me how she thinks about food sovereignty.

**TS**: It's about power to make decisions, and who has the power to make decisions about our food. And so, a food sovereign situation would be one in which eaters and feeders have sovereignty over decisions about the food system. They have the ability to make those decisions and they have power there. Not as individuals though, because I think there is this risk that, when we talk about food sovereignty, that we come close to a kind of individualism where it's everybody for themselves.

Sovereignty can only happen in and through community. It is a collective concept. It's not an individual concept. So yeah, individual having food skills might be an important part of an individual being sovereign over food. But really, the more important thing is the whole food system, and collectively, do we have ways to support skills, and promote skills and so forth? Those are more of the questions.

**AD**: Oh, interesting, I love that Theresa centers community in her understanding of food sovereignty. So, we’re not thinking here about the food system that I want, but how we can work together to build the food systems that we want as a community.

**LY**: Right, and in this way of thinking about food sovereignty, farmers, producers, and eaters all have a role to play in defining the food system. But there are still very real barriers to smaller scale farmers and producers defining and participating in food systems— especially when larger scale farmers, food producers, and retailers hold so much power and influence over how and what kind of food is grown, processed, distributed, and sold. I asked Theresa to tell me about how digital technologies could help smaller scale farmers and producers overcome some of these barriers. She told me about how Open Food Network, the digital platform she’s working with, contributes to food sovereignty.

**TS**: So, I mean, just, it might be helpful to back up a bit first because of course there's all kinds of technologies and I'm, I'm focused more on digital kind of technologies.

What we see happening is, a platform is really just an infrastructure. It's like a framework for exchanges. So, some of the things that I see, ways that platforms can address some of those food system challenges for small farmers, really the first is, this idea of disrupting these inflexible chains, these inflexible value-chains and making them more useful for small-scale farmers.

Platforms allow the collectivizing many to sell to the collective of many without a funnel in the middle. And so, that kind of changes the nature of supply chains quite a bit. So, I think there's that opening up of new market opportunities, that happens with the technology for farmers, more efficiently than it has before.

The second concern I talked about was these changing consumer models, and so we already see in the platform world, this issue of whether we call it the sharing economy, or the on-demand economy, or these various things where goods are being offered up for exchange.   
So, you know, Airbnb are kind of the classic things. But there's also like parking sharing, and ride sharing, and bicycle sharing, and all this, right? And there is now food sharing. And this is just beginning, but lots of platforms that are looking at food sharing as a way of addressing food waste, right? So, there's that kind of angle on it. Many opportunities there, but also opportunities cause seeing CSAs as sharing, and giving consumers a way into the planning and operation of farms, right? There are CSAs where people use a platform cause the buyers, if you will, use a platform to have a say in what I want in my harvest next year, right? Like the planning of the farm. And this can all be a sort of seeing the farm as a ‘commons’ now, can be facilitated by the development of platforms too. So, consumers can begin to get that that activist role that they kind of want, the hands-on role that they want, technology can start to facilitate that. And then the third thing is, you know, the problems with production management. How does technology solve that? So, there's all kinds of peer-to-peer exchange platforms and bulletin boards, and of course, it's global, right? It doesn't matter to me if it's someone in Southern France who answers my question or someone here, you know, someone with the same situation answers my question. So that's fantastic.

**AD**: Okay, so let me try to summarize what I just heard from Theresa. There are 3 ways that Open Food Network contributes to food sovereignty. The first is that the platform is designed with justice and fairness in mind, which means it could help could disrupt supply chains, make it clearer where food is coming from, and support collective visions of food systems. {Laine: [right]}. Alright, great. The second is the way that platforms like Open Food Network can connect growers and eaters, so that farmers and food producers have direct access to buyers and eaters, and vice versa.

**LY**: Yes, and that direct two-way exchange creates the opportunity to see the farm as a ‘commons’—something that everyone has a stake in.

**AD**: Right, and the third way that Open Food Network contributes to food sovereignty is to help solve production management issues by facilitating peer-to-peer learning.

**LY**: Yes. So, Open Food Network helps to address the three challenges Theresa identified for us earlier—inaccessible supply chains, lack of direct access to buyers and eaters, and product management.

**AD**: Okay, but why is Open Food Network different than, say, Shopify, or another online selling and purchasing platform?

**LY**: Great question. For Theresa and others at Open Food Network, the key is open-source data

**AD**: Okay, go on.

**LY**: Well, with an increase in technology across all facets of farming and food production, there’s also been an increase in the kind of, and amount of data available. There’s data about the weather, or growing seasons, or the most efficient soil inputs to use, or seed genetics, or consumer markets. But, if that data isn’t freely accessible to everyone, only those that can afford it have access. That means that smaller scale farmers and producers, are priced out of accessing certain datasets. Here’s Theresa with more:

**TS**: What is becoming really clear is, in order for that benefit to happen for small scale farmers, we have to have datasets that are open source. Because, if it's a proprietary dataset, these farmers are not going to be able to pay for access to that data. And so weather data being open sources, you know, kind of pretty common, but there's lots of other kinds of data too, pricing data, right? What, what are the prices for crops historically for different kinds of buyers? Right? And how do I integrate my production management to best advantage for those prices, right? This is all things that are totally possible today. If, if the data is open source, it means that it's nonproprietary so that it's owned in commons, by everyone, and not owned by someone who can take it away from you, or who you have to pay to get. {Laine: [Right]}. When things are held in commons, we are all the shepherds of that data. We all share responsibility for its maintenance, and for its perpetuation, ‘commons’ is about community. It only exists because a community is perpetuating it.

**AD**: Whoa. Wait, I hadn't ever considered that information about farming might not be public.

**LY**: Right? It’s a huge problem when certain companies control access to the data that everyone needs. Food sovereignty is built on shared ownership of food systems. That can’t happen in meaningful way if only a few players control and own all of data.

{[Musical break]}

I asked Theresa to tell me more about Open Food Network, and how it brings food sovereignty and technological sovereignty together.

**TS**: First of all, it's a global community. And, and what we do as a community is, we're building the tools and the resources and sharing them for a new global food system that is fair and regenerative, local, transparent. So, that's really important because, you know, there are examples of other, other technology groups that have built platforms or tools, but have not had a robust community generating, and regenerating behind those tools. And so therefore, nobody maintains them after a while. You know, we all know this with like resource centers and libraries, right? If you don't have a community and practices that are regenerative to it doesn't matter how much time you invest initially in creating the thing, right? And technology more so than lots of things, needs constant, like the speed of change is unbelievable. So, you need a robust community.

And our mission as a community is to build, we call it a ‘global food commons.’ So, these are networks, they’re tools, they’re people, they’re resources, different kinds of infrastructure for food system transformation. And that's what we're putting together in about 12 countries right now. But, it’s a scale neutral. It's a technology program that allows people to find each other, first of all, map and find each other. Secondly, to create virtual lists of offerings or products that are offered by producers. So, we call them a producer, and they are at the core of the system because only a producer can offer a product on Open Food Network. And, and that product is always traceable and transparent to that named producer once they offer it. So, it doesn't lose its identity in the system anywhere. And those products when they're created are created virtually first.

And so, imagine in Waterloo region, we have, right now, I think there's about 90 virtual product lists in Open Food Network. These are producers who have offered their products on the network. They've established what they are, they described them, they show pictures, they set pricing, they determine how much they have available on a given day, et cetera, et cetera. And then anyone, any buyer, or any food hub, or reseller can ask for permission of that producer to carry their product in a virtual store, an online store. And that can happen any number of times to any number of stores.

So, the real thing that makes it different, is that it focuses on this sovereignty of the producer. Everything starts with the producer, the producer sets the price, and the producer gives permission to who's going to sell, and where they're going to sell, and how they're going to sell.

**AD**: Oh wow, okay. I’d thought that Open Food Network was just an e-commerce platform, but it’s sounds like it’s a lot more than that.

**LY**: Yeah, it is. It’s got all of the classic e-commerce features—like an online storefront, and ways of managing inventory and payments— but Open Food Network comes at the issue in a totally different way—they’ve built their business model around protecting and enabling the sovereignty of farmers and food producers. Theresa told me that when she sits down with food producers to describe the possibilities offered by Open Food Network and goes through their individual needs, that conversation is often transformational. Here’s Theresa:

**TS**: The description of what's possible changes their business model because they will say, “I didn't use to do that, but I think I'll do that now.” Right. And the vice versa happens.

So, they'll say, “so what if, can I have them pre-purchase out of a preset inventory that's set in the future, like a future’s market?” And I’ll have to say, “not yet, but let me write that down.” How would you like that to work? And then that goes into our global wish-list, right? Because now we have a user who has something new, a new bell, a new whistle that they want, and then a few other people ask for that same bell or whistle and we prioritize that feature and there it is. That's what a community does. So, these things are co-constructed and I, you know, as an academic, I remember reading this word, “co-construction,” all the time and always kind of stumbling over that one. Like what does that really mean? And I feel in my bones what that means, that, that such a dynamic process of mutuality that that goes on. So, that's what Open Food Network does.

**AD**: Huh, that’s so interesting that just the initial conversation about what’s possible, opens up the way that producers are thinking about their business models. And it’s incredible that Open Food Network facilitates the kind of co-construction that Theresa describes here.

**LY**: Yeah, it is. Open Food Network is leveraging the platform that they’ve built through this incredible community of activist coders, to deal with the practical needs of food producers in real time. That means that Theresa spends a lot of time working directly with folks for whom an online platform is pretty new. I asked her what that looks like.

**TS**: So, I try to, a lot of what I do is just encourage people to take that step and do it. Cause people are very hesitant about technology. You know, they're very thinking, “My gosh, I think I broke something”. I get, I hear that all the time. I think I'm pretty sure you didn't break something right. And if you did, then we need to make it more robust. It's not your fault, right. We are actually the managers of it. So, yeah, I spend a lot of time just convincing people to have some fun and play around. And it doesn't matter if you never use it again, like you're not, we don't charge people until they're fully integrated and actually up and selling stuff on the network. And because I'm a researcher then too, and, and have some research projects related to food and, and technology. I'm usually, you know, interviewing people about their techniques. I love hearing people's tech stories now, like cause, {Laine: [yeah]}, yeah, farmers always have really good ones.

{[Musical Break]}

**AD**: So, when Theresa is working with the producers who are using Open Food Network, they are creating new solutions in the platform to help manage their product or access new markets, right? {Laine: [yes]}. And that’s code?

**LY**: Yes, remember we talked earlier about code, which is all the information that goes into creating a platform.

**AD**: Theresa said that producers can suggest new solutions and that once those are designed, or coded, they’re available to everyone, right?

**LY**: Yeah. Open Food Network is built entirely out of open-source code—that means that all the functions and solutions built for the platform are owned by and available to all its users. That means that the community can problem solve together, share those solutions, and connect in ways that enable new food systems.

**AD**: Okay, but I’m having a little trouble wrapping my head around open-source code and why It's important.

**LY**: Fair enough—it feels a bit unfamiliar to think about code as something that might need to be protected in the commons. I found it helpful to think about the similarities to seed saving movements, like La Via Campasina—which are an attempt to protect seeds and all of their genetic information, from being patented, owned, and controlled by private interests. I asked Theresa to tell me about the parallels between the seed saving and code saving movements.

**TS**: So, I think this is an interesting thing because I do think this is what, this is a good language to speak to foodies and farmers about technology because we all know what happened with seeds. We all have been part of the seed story. So, you know, just suddenly we started to realize we couldn't get varieties. Why can't I get that anymore? Look it, it's not in any of these catalogs. What's happening? And then it quickly becomes, no, nobody can get it. Well, how can that be? How can we not get a variety? Well, we cannot get a variety because it turns out the rights to that variety were purchased by someone and someone owns them. And I remember the first time that hit me, I was absolutely stunned. Like, how can someone own genetics, you know, a variety?! Like I just, it’d never occurred to me, and so very quickly, there was this sense of our sovereignty being threatened by that. So, we started saving our own seed. And that led to a whole all kinds of infrastructure and projects around seed saving and how to save seed. And that led to what I would, what you would kind of call “enforced sharing,” right? Which is open source, right? It's like it's a legal protection now. So, it's not just, it's fine that we're all saving our seeds, but then it became clear that, well, some people are being prosecuted for saving seeds and that led to open-source seed, which is a legal protection. So, in technology it's the same thing, right? A platform you're using today could be gone tomorrow because someone made a business decision to sell it and change it. And we, we see how this happening all the time. Well, this isn't supported anymore. This isn't available anymore. It might be something that perfectly met your needs, that was exactly what you needed, but it's out of your hands. You have absolutely no power to make decisions about that.

Or you're using a platform. And I think this is really often the case with small scale farmers, where the owners of that platform clearly are trying to make money and so they're going to be developing features and pricing models that suit larger enterprises and enterprises that can pay more. Right. And it's suddenly, it's not going to make sense for you. You're gonna say, well, with open source, nobody owns it. You are the owner. You know, it, you can determine what you want that code to be. And you don't have to be a coder for that to happen because this isn't about some kind of technological individualism. You don't have to know code. You don't have to have this kind of experience. You have to know community. You have to understand that community is the solution, and that there is a community. And we will take your issue to a community for solving and, and for coding and for, you know, that's the whole point. That's why we're all working together on this because when, you know, three or four farmers say to me, “I really need the ability to take pre-orders.” Okay, that's next on our list. Pre-orders, let's do that.

And that's remarkably different from, how do proprietary software determine the new features, the ones that are gonna make money, or the ones the investors want. So, there's different interests at, at play. And open source just means that we protect that legally. We protect the code. Basically, this means that anybody can download the code base. It's up there on a website, and anybody can download it for free. If, however, you download it and you change it, you make an improvement to that code. You come up with the how to do pre-orders bit. You are required under this license, to reoffer that code to the whole community. So, you can make money and you can advance and you can make profit, you can just not benefit exclusively. That's all. You have to share back with the community. So, in that sense, we're always standing on each other's shoulders. We're always going further together, and that's protected legally.

**AD**: So, Theresa is talking about legal protections for publicly owned seeds and code. That’s incredible.

**LY**: It’s extremely important. And as Theresa said, when the community owns something collectively, we’re always standing on each other's shoulders to create better solutions together. I asked Theresa to spell out the relationship between food sovereignty and tech sovereignty for me. Here she is.

**TS**: Well, you know, they're both sovereignties, so they're both about decision-making. One is about decision-making around the food system. One is about decision-making around technology, but they both happen in community. They're both perpetuated by community and can't exist without community. And I guess the reason I put them together is because increasingly, they're one and the same thing. Because I think we can't have, in today's age, we can't have food sovereignty without tech sovereignty because all, everything about our food system today is embodied in code. It's embodied digitally. We don't think about it cause we think about food as, you know, these kind of hard material things in front of us. But this peach has code embodied in it in the sense that it's variety information. Who owned that variety, where the source came from? It's production information. Who produced it? What did they use in the production of it? How did it transport, how far did it come from, what's it good for? What recipes are using this particular kind of peach? Where was it sold? Who paid for it? How many people accessed it? How many units are there of this peach? Everything around this peach is held digitally, and right now it's held digitally in proprietary systems. We don't control any of the information about that peach.

**AD**: Okay that’s all well and good, but who would ever need that much information about a peach?

**LY**: [laughs] I asked Theresa that question exactly. Here’s what she said:

**TS**: If we ever decide we want to do something different about that peach, then having the information is important, or if we want to learn about the peach, or we want to improve the peach, we want the peach to be traded more fairly. We want to know who got how much money from the peach. We want to follow the money. We want to do something about the peach, then that relies on information that we can access in some way, and that we can control.

**AD**: Oh, wow!

**LY**: Yeah, it’s pretty incredible to think about all of the ways that access to data enables food sovereignty. Theresa had been telling me about her thinking around the relationship between food sovereignty and tech sovereignty, as the Director of Open Food Network Canada and as a researcher. But I was also interested to know if Theresa’s experiences with Open Food Network had changed things for her as a farmer. Here’s what she told me.

**TS**: Yeah. Well, yes, so there's two things. If I put on my farmer hat for a minute, it's, it's changed the actual mechanics, the administration of farm management for me tremendously. It's made my marketing and my selling—the part that I hated the most and still hate the most—so much easier in so many ways. Right? So, and yes, there was a learning curve and yes, the learning curve was painful and you know, I'll never tell anybody that's going to be an easy curve. So yeah, that, that from a farmer perspective it's just made such a difference. It's given me freedom over a whole bunch of selling opportunities and access to change that I didn't have before. And lots of things like that.

On a more, as a person though, I wish I had a soundbite answer here because I think it's a very complicated story and someday, I'll understand it and write it, but I, I have some very strange experience with technology. It's not a neutral thing. It's not politically neutral. Technology is very value laden and I, and that has been a big learning for me. You know? It, I think there's so many themes around technology just sort of generally, right? About, about the unknown issues around power and control, fears. I've had deep fears about, you know, an in, and it's an age thing too, right? Here I am in my retirement years, hanging out with this group of young coders, right, who are kind of starting out and gonna change the world through code. And here I am a person who, for me, my life has been around civil disobedience and resistance, but I'm old school. Like you walk in protests and you carry placards. I mean, this is what resistance is. And to then be put in front of the idea that resistance can be really different. And who am I to judge whether something is or isn't resistance anyway? And this whole group of people who have a completely different perspective on justice and changing the world, that isn't only about government policy change, which is how I spent my whole life.

There is something so completely different about this particular community that I'm part of, that than for any community I've ever been part of, that it's vibrant and exciting and integrated. The different parts of their lives are, I don't know, I, there's just something quite different and I, I'm, I know I'm floundering for words because I haven't, I can't kind of name the experience yet. But I, very early on when I first kind of started hanging out with the Open Food Network crew you know, I came home and I said to Peter like, my husband, this, this is where I want to spend my retirement years. This is how my circle ends of life. I know this now. This is, this is what I have been waiting for my entire life. I have been waiting for, and trying other communities to get to this community.

And how can one have that feeling? I have been in lots of global change communities, but I have not felt the hope and the excitement about system transformation. Like La Via Campesina really charged me, right? Like, that was “Holy cow!”, but this was like double Holy cow, this, this is gonna go. The potentials just so unbelievable here. So yeah, it's really, for me, it makes me wish I had started out as a coder or something.

**AD**: Wow, you can really hear the passion in Theresa’s voice about this work. And hope for the future is a pretty important thing to have right now

**LY**: Yeah, it really is. And the conversation I had with Theresa was about a year ago. A lot has happened since then.

**AD**: Uh, that’s the understatement of the year!

**LY**: [Chuckle] right?

**AD**: With all of the major shifts that are happening as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, the summer of 2019 feels like a decade ago!

**LY**: Yeah, the pandemic has exposed some major gaps and inequities in our food system.

And— along with the worldwide protests against racism and police brutality after the death of George Floyd— we’re starting to have productive conversations and action, around systemic racism and inequity in our food system, and our society more broadly. There’s a lot of work being done throughout food systems research and activist communities, to push for change as we move forward.

**AD**: Right, and one of the places some of that change is happening is in the online space, right?

**LY**: Absolutely, especially with social distancing. We’ve seen a major and very quick move to online food markets, and Open Food Network is on the forefront of that work. The latest Open Food Network newsletter explains that the organization has experienced unprecedented growth in recent months, as local food producers and consumers, have turned to online solutions. Since April, user engagement with Open Food Network Canada’s web page has grown exponentially.

**AD**: As the situation continues to change, it’s great to see how Open Food Network has stepped up to help smaller scale farmers and producers adapt. As someone who is interested in purchasing locally and sustainably produced food—especially under the circumstances—I’m pretty thankful that I have access, through Open Food Network, to our local seedling sale, and my favorite local café. So, how can folks get in touch with Open Food Network?

**LY**: They can visit openfoodnetwork.ca to connect with Theresa and her team. We've also got more info and links in our show notes.

{[Music Break]}

**AD**: Okay, it sounds like that’s a wrap on this episode.

**LY**: It is, and that’s a wrap on the first season of *Handpicked: Stories from the Field*. Thanks so much for listening.

**AD**: And thanks to everyone who helped make our first season a success. We’re so privileged to work with excellent sustainable food systems researchers and advocates and to help share their work with you. Over the summer we’ll be developing new content for season 2, and collecting feedback on how we can improve our shows. If you want to share your thoughts on *Handpicked*, we’d love to hear from you. Keep an eye on our social media channels—we'll post more information as it becomes available.

**LY**: We’ve also included resources in our shows notes for this episode on how to support and promote action to address anti-black racism, and other inequities in our food systems. You can find our show notes and other teaching resources on our website.

{[Outro Music]}

**AD**: Please subscribe to the podcast wherever you listen, and maybe share it with a friend. We’d be so grateful if you could write a us review on iTunes so more people can find the show!

**LY**: You can also follow us on twitter at @handpickedpodc, search our name on Facebook to join the group, or send us an e-mail at [handpickedpodcast@wlu.ca](mailto:handpickedpodcast@wlu.ca)

**AD**: Special thanks Theresa Schumilas for telling us all about her work.

**LY**: This episode was hosted and produced by us, Laine Young, {Amanda: [and Amanda Di Battista]}, with research and editing by Adedotun Babajide, Chiamaka Okafor-Justin, and Jake Bernstein. Our music is composed by Keenan Reimer-Watts. We would like to acknowledge that this episode was recorded and produced on the lands of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee people. We encourage you all to click the land acknowledgement link in the show notes to learn more.

**AD**: *Handpicked* is produced with support from the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Wilfrid Laurier University, the Balsille School of International Affairs, and the Centre for International Governance Innovation. As always, I’m Amanda Di Battista...

**LY**: And I’m Laine Young. And this has been another episode of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems’ Podcast, *Handpicked*.

**AD**: Be sure to join us again in the fall for more freshly picked stories from the field.