Marguerite Green

Louisiana Food Policy Council — New Orleans, LA

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Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is July 3, [2025], a Thursday, just before noon, and we're continuing the garden series of oral history interviews and we're recording this session at my house in New Orleans and I'm sitting here with Marguerite Green. I'm gonna have her introduce herself please.

Marguerite Green: Hey, should I grab this from you?

Rien Fertel: I can hold it.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, here you can take it. Hi, Margee, Marguerite Green, and, yeah, happy to be here talking about gardening.

Rien Fertel: And if you don't mind sharing your birthdate please.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, it's May 2, 1988.

Rien Fertel: We'll be talking about diversity of careers and hats you've born in the city and here in Louisiana, when you introduce or meet people for the first time, how do you introduce yourself?

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Marguerite Green: Well, that's a complicated question. I think most people know me by Margee and I used to introduce myself exclusively as Margee, I grew up being called Margee exclusively, and then probably in my very early thirties started using Marguerite sometimes because Margee is hard for intonation. People call me Margie or Margee, like there's a — I can't even say it wrong — I usually don't notice until it's happened a bunch. I usually say, "I'm Margee Green and if that's difficult for you, call me Marguerite."

Rien Fertel: Sure, and what do you call yourself? Do you call yourself a —

Marguerite Green: Like when I'm self-talking?

Rien Fertel: No, do you think of yourself as an activist or a gardener or all of these things?

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Marguerite Green: That's a very interesting question. I think I have a couple of titles and then they switch in importance. So I think at this moment, I am an organizer. In other moments of my life, I would've said farmer first, organizer second. At this moment, I would say organizer first, farmer-slash-gardener second. It's probably an organizer and a farmer and then those flip-flop based on what's going on in my life and the world.

Rien Fertel: And we'll talk about all those, let's maybe start at the beginning. Where were you born, where do you come from?

Marguerite Green: I'm from New Orleans, Louisiana, couple blocks from here. So I was born at Baptist and lived in New Orleans for my young childhood.

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Marguerite Green: We moved to Atlanta when I was six or seven, and then moved back to Louisiana a couple of years later. We were in Atlanta for a short period of time, moved to Abita. And so I kind of, I have like a pretty common — Northshore, Abita, Madisonville, and New Orleans are the places that I really claim.

Rien Fertel: And because we're gonna be talking about gardening and food and farm production during this conversation, at any point in your young life did that pop up? Were your parents or anyone in your family home gardeners or involved in any of the topics we'll be discussing today?

Marguerite Green: Yeah, my mom became a single mom when we were in Atlanta, and we moved back to be closer to her family. I think that was a moment for her to be like, "We're gonna move back but now to the country and I'm gonna plant a garden."

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Marguerite Green: I can very much understand, that is probably what I would also do if I became a single mom. I'd be like, we're going to rural Abita and I'm gonna have tomatoes. So that's what she did and that was the first time — we had a house very similar to this when I was a child and there was always a garden between this and the shed and she would do laundry in the shed and I would be in the garden right here. I remember playing with like the crape myrtles uptown and being very into plants as a child. Mostly like testing them apart, figuring out how the veins worked in leaves and stuff like that. But I didn't think of myself as a — it was more like plants are around you and you explore them, I didn't think about being in a formal relationship with them until my mom started gardening. And I was so uninterested in it when she started gardening, it was like this extra thing she added, and she started fussing with it. Yeah, no it was not my thing when I was a child.

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Rien Fertel: Did she try to encourage you to help her?

Marguerite Green: Mmm-hmm, yeah. She made it allowance contingent and so that is the thing that I probably will *not* do for my daughter cause it made me not wanna garden. I was like a full

grown adult before I realized it was the only thing that ever made me happy. It was the most centering thing in my whole world and I had been avoiding it.

Rien Fertel: So when did that moment happen in your adult life?

Marguerite Green: It happened at LSU. So I was an art major and I could pick an elective. And so I picked a gardening elective, Organic Gardening, and I did that one class. And it was science heavy and it wasn't just fluffy — I thought it was gonna be. And just day one I was like, "Oh, this is the coolest." Just getting a PowerPoint, we started with a PowerPoint and I had never really engaged with science before, I'd always been like an arts kind of kid, and this thing that felt magical was being explained via science to me.

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Marguerite Green: And it was like one of those moments in your life where you're like, "Oh, my God, I'm a different person than I thought I was!" And so I changed my major after that semester to agriculture.

Rien Fertel: That's a wonderful story. I wanna ask, because LSU is an AG school, the state's AG school, was this an intensive course or was it an elective blow-off course?

Marguerite Green: Totally an elective blow-off course. It was all people like me. You don't take that class if you're an AG major. It is not a class for agriculture majors. But it was my foot in the door to agriculture. I met a bunch of other hippies in that class. It was like people who were there for poetry or art or whatever tryna learn how to grow a tomato.

Rien Fertel: And so it was really a day one looking at that PowerPoint or was it over the course of that semester?

Marguerite Green: I think I knew I wanted to change majors day one.

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Marguerite Green: And then it took that semester to say that out loud. It was my freshman year and I was living in the dorms. When you're going to college it's so much change all at once and so I was a little bit like, "Am I just grasping at straws and tryna figure out who I am?" So I gave myself a semester and then I told my mom I wanted to switch. And I think she was very encouraging of it because something more rigid than art. It was like, what are you going to do with art? She was like, "Oh yeah, these are the things you could support yourself with in AG." So she was very encouraging of it.

Rien Fertel: And so then you were kind of taking the full agricultural curriculum there. What were some of the stand out moments in your undergraduate years at LSU?

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Marguerite Green: So LSU, that it is the one regenerative or sustainable class that LSU has and it's not a rigorous class and it's not part of the degree program. So I think I just had a pretty quick realization that the thing I wanted to know about was not the thing that I was being taught. But there's this like extremely southern experience of being like, "Alright, this is what I'm getting. I gotta figure out how to make this be the thing I wanted it to be." So I think about calibrating boom sprayers, which was a part of my undergraduate experience, and I was like, "I don't think I'm ever gonna be using a boom sprayer."

Rien Fertel: What is a boom sprayer?

Marguerite Green: A boom sprayer would be like when you look at the big stock photography of large-scale agriculture, it's those arms, those wings that go out over huge fields and spray chemicals. And so you have to figure out how to calculate the spray rate of what goes through those nozzles.

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Marguerite Green: It's a very like mathematical process because you have to not over apply or under apply and so a lot of people use baby bottles as a - you have to catch what comes out, and

then you have to use that in a math equation to figure out how much chemicals are being put out. And so I just had this moment of calculating the boom sprayer, catching poison in a baby bottle, which feels like depression or something or it feels like foreboding, I guess. And so capturing that and then getting the jeans that I was wearing were bleached by whatever the chemical was in there, I don't even remember. I just had those moments where I was like, hmm, "This is what I have to ace to be allowed to grow food for my community." [Laughs] So that's definitely one. I also remember I took my first husbandry class, so I took a livestock class and it was chickens, and I was already keeping chickens at that point. This would've been like senior year or junior year.

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Marguerite Green: And I sat down in the class and it became immediately clear to me what we were talking about was keeping a thousand poorly bred birds alive for as short a period of time as you needed them to. And I was like, "Oh no, I'm in fully the wrong place." I thought we were gonna be talking about how to keep egg-laying hens or meat birds at scale. I did drop that class cause I was like, this is not even within the realm of what I need to learn.

Rien Fertel: Were most of your classmates enrolled in the same program, were any of them on the same track as you, or were they going into agribusiness or big farm and that sort of thing?

Marguerite Green: No one that I'm thinking of at the moment graduated the semester, the year that I did with me, but in our sort of cohort

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Marguerite Green: there are just five or six people that are still — they're my closest people even if we're not so close because it's an experience of trying to use that program to become this person. So there's a women named Stephanie Elwood who does a lot of this exact work in Baton Rouge still, she stayed in Baton Rouge, we were partners for a very long time in this work. She's like my person and I think that's a trial by fire thing. I was at a woman named Alisha Andrews's farm on Tuesday. She's outside Lafayette now and she's a regenerative flower farmer and a new parent as well. So there were not many people, but the ones who were there I feel like — or Charlie Loup who's a vegetable farmer in New Roads. So the people who came out of that program tryna do something a little bit different, I think are bonded in a way that is really cool. But for the most part, no I think I was an oddity to most of my classmates.

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Rien Fertel: So when did you graduate and where'd you go next?

Marguerite Green: Graduated in 2011. I should've graduated with an art degree in 2010, but I had never taken a science or math course in my life that I wasn't forced to, so I took an extra

year to get my science pre-reqs and stuff. And then I considered staying in Baton Rouge and continuing to do the work that I was doing during college, which was community gardening and youth agriculture work that I had started with Stephanie. We basically did like what would be a proto-nonprofit but we didn't have any money to do it. And I was like, "I'm gonna stay and we're gonna figure out how to do it full time." And then I think pretty quickly I was like actually I have a bloom where you're planted mentality and Baton Rouge has a lot of really serious economic struggles and it's not my community. And so I was like, "Uh, I think that my ethos is that I need to go back home." And so that is what brought me back to New Orleans.

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Rien Fertel: And did you find a job in the community gardens sector?

Marguerite Green: Yeah, I started at Perino's. So I became a nursery horticulturist at Perino's, answered plant questions, and I think because I was the young person there at that moment I also programmed their computer — who knows if I did it right. But I did all of their Latin names in their computer to figure out how they would sell things and I think it was the first printing of barcodes that they had done. So I set that system up cause I could look at the plants, know what they were, put them in the computer. And so I did that to pay the bills for a few months while I looked for jobs. It would have been recession-y era and so jobs were difficult but it was very much post-Katrina New Orleans.

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Marguerite Green: Even though it was several years out, obviously. And so there were all of these non-profit jobs that paid no money that I was like jockeying for. I remember I applied to Edible Schoolyard. I was still living in Baton Rouge when I applied for that job, I was like this is the most important job I could ever get. I didn't get it, they hired a classroom teacher for it and I was devastated. But I eventually got a job at HandsOn New Orleans and I was managing all the garden projects, so new garden builds and community engagement around garden stuff. It was very similar to what I had been doing in Baton Rouge.

Rien Fertel: Where did you go from there?

Marguerite Green: So I worked at HandsOn until they did a big round of layoffs and

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Marguerite Green: it was a very weird moment to be maybe twenty-three or twenty-two and I was laid off.

Rien Fertel: Can you say what HandsOn did, I'm sorry.

Marguerite Green: Oh yeah, so HandsOn coordinated volunteers for myriad rebuilding projects in the city. So mostly it would be like individual house work, they would do like painting of houses or flooring or tile projects. They did civic engagement stuff. It was just kind of a volunteer based, broad catch all for post-Katrina New Orleans civic participation and volunteer participation. So in my role there I was designing school gardens, and then my boss would go find basically corporate volunteer projects to pay for those builds. And then we would get those volunteers to then go build those school gardens. Or sometimes we would

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Marguerite Green: be able to say, "Okay, we're looking for a garden in the Ninth Ward." And then we'd go and bring a volunteer group to the Ninth Ward and charge that volunteer group twenty dollars a head and pay for lumber. It's a model that's used all over the country I think. But a lot of times it was like, "Oh, we're bringing Phillip Morris to the Capital One elementary and they're building raised beds that no one will tend." That's the story of post-Katrina New Orleans.

Rien Fertel: This is very familiar to me. We were talking before I started recording, I was a volunteer leader and you were probably my volunteer boss at some point, tryna to figure it out. But yes, there would often be these corporate groups and I would lead them in painting tombs in St. Louis Cemetery Number One or planting native grasses in pots to eventually bring to the Gulf coast.

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Rien Fertel: Yeah that was it. I was there for a couple years. But you got laid off and what happened then?

Marguerite Green: So funny to be just like asked that question and tell the story around it. So I got laid off and I had started farming in Baton Rouge. And I had begun farming a piece of my then boyfriend's family land outside of Baton Rouge, closer to St. Francisville, so that was the first time that I had grown alone on multiple acres. It was a terrible failure cause there was no deer fencing.

Rien Fertel: Okay, so what were you tryna grow?

Marguerite Green: I was tryna grow watermelons and zinnia. I did pull off the zinnia and the watermelon all got eaten by deer. And the zinnia all went to actually the first wedding that I was the wedding florist for, which was two farmers who now run Fullness Organic Farms outside of Baton Rouge,

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Marguerite Green: Allison and Grant Guidroz. But they were in this AG world with me and they were like, "You have land, you grow stuff, grow us our wedding flowers." So I had done that

farm project and had multiple acres, grew multiple acres of zinnia. They wrote me a check at their wedding. It was the most money anyone had ever given me for doing anything in the garden or a farm and I was like, "Huh, that's interesting, flowers seem to maybe make some money." So when I moved here — turned that farm under, it was way too far away — and when I moved here I started looking for land so that I could do that at night, after the job at Perino's, after the HandsOn. I was like no matter what I was doing, I'm gonna be running my own farm and then doing a day job. And so I got laid off at HandsOn and I basically was like, this is my shot to just start full-time farming.

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Marguerite Green: Funny, at LSU they taught me everything I need to know about the science of plants and nothing that I needed to know about the business of growing food and flowers. No shade to any of my professors but they didn't.

Rien Fertel: There's no lecture where it's like how to approach a farmers market or how to —?

Marguerite Green: No, no, no. We did have a business class where I was given the opportunity to do a business plan. And I did that business plan and the numbers — I looked it recently, I found it in an old drive, the numbers are insane. I am like, if I paid myself $1.50 an hour — it's nonsense, right, and no one called me on it. So I was like, "Here I go, I'm gonna start my

business." And so the day after I went out and had a couple of beers and then I woke up the next day and I got a credit card.

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Marguerite Green: I literally just did the online application for a credit card. I drew my own logo. I got business cards printed at whatever was doing stuff like that back then, this would've been 2012 or '11 maybe even, it might've been the end of '11. And then I started looking for land — or I think I already had land at that point, actually. So I did all of the things. I filed for my LLC, I got a family friend to help with the paperwork, a lawyer who is still named on my documents and still probably gets calls about my first business. And I just did all of the little business stuff and then started going to markets. So that is what was next. And landscaping, which is classic urban farmer behavior. I was like landscaping and farming simultaneously to just try to make ends meet, which was easier back then cause my rent in New Orleans at that point was three hundred dollars.

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Rien Fertel: So where were you farming and what were you farming.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, so the first piece of land that I farmed on, I had gotten connected to Jeanette Bell who became my mentor, my garden mom as she still calls herself, and I came to

Jeanette's garden that first summer. She went out of town and put me in charge of her garden. So I was running the ship at that garden cause she went up to see her daughter who was in Detroit at that time, I think, with her grandbaby. And so I ran that garden and she said whatever you grow out of this garden over the summer you could sell it. And then she also brought me to another garden which is I think one of the most storied places in New Orleans agriculture, which is called Sun Done Gardens. And lots of people — I love that you know, you've heard of Sun Done before. But, so she had a bunch of land at Sun Done at that point I think,

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Marguerite Green: Macon Fry had the center, Jamal [Elhayek] was there with me. I think Jeanette was sort of mentoring both Jamal and I simultaneously. And so she gave me a portion of what she had at Sun Done, the front area that was in ground. So then I started growing zinnias up there, densities of a lot of zinnias for market. Only zinnias. And I was going to market with them. And so then —

Rien Fertel: And market was the Crescent City Farmers Market?

Marguerite Green: At that point market was actually the Sankofa that was in the Holy Angels parking lot, right there was my first market. Jeannette got the umbrella in my car. She was like, "Here's what your putting in your car. Now go." It was very much push me out of the nest to go sell at that first market, and then I sold at that market every Saturday for quite a while.

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Marguerite Green: And I made ten dollars a week or something and I spent it on iced coffee. But so anyway then I went to Sun Done. I never owned any space at Jeannette's big garden, that was always hers and so then after that summer of watching it she sort of graduated me to Sun Done**.** And so I was at Sun Done for quite a while, until I signed my first lease, and that property was on Mandeville by Jack's Meat Market. And it was the first fenced property that was mine and I gardened there for many, many years until it got developed.

Rien Fertel: So it was, I'm guessing a lot that was a former house that was torn down?

Marguerite Green: A former house, yeah, it was a post-Katrina tear down and it was part of the Habitat program, the Habitat for Humanity program.

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Marguerite Green: So I had the one dollar a year lease for many, many years.

Rien Fertel: And what were you growing there?

Marguerite Green: Flowers. I'll always grow myself food, and I've always brought some food to market when there's too much and I've always done tree fruit, but pretty much from the minute I started trying to pay my bills with agriculture, I realized pretty quickly it had to be flowers if anything.

Rien Fertel: And what was the name of the business?

Marguerite Green: So the business is still — I use a DBA now — but the business is still Cow Apple Horticulture. It makes me cringe, the first thing you name your business is always like, especially when you're twenty-one or whatever. Yeah, so its Cow Apple Horticulture LLC and then I changed that business name many years later to Fat River, which is still what it is.

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Marguerite Green: It's an underactive business now but that is still what it legally is called.

Rien Fertel: So I'm guessing beyond the market or markets, were you also doing weddings and events?

Marguerite: Yeah, so I started building wedding clientele pretty quickly from that and that is many years of my life. I've done up to thirty weddings. There's was definitely a burgeoning

industry of people who wanted local and organic flowers in their weddings and so I ended up in a pretty serious wedding hustle until COVID.

Rien Fertel: And at some point, I'm guessing around this time you did take a job at NOCCA Press Street, is that around this time?

Marguerite Green: Yeah, so I guess I'm just — not that I think all of this is interesting — but just to figure myself out so it would've been, I farmed

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Marguerite Green: and I was having a really hard time making ends meet just farming. I ended up working at Midway Pizza, so I started waiting tables. I worked at Tree, which is doing outdoor environmental education for kids. That's like a very — you get a hundred dollars a day and you only get to go to work if it's not raining. So I ended up sort of cobbling a bunch of stuff together and then at some point in 2013, I think, somewhere in that range, I was really desperate for a job with benefits and I applied for the manager of what was called at that point Roots Studio. It was like the theoretical garden of NOCCA, the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. So I went through that process and became the founding director, but also it wasn't a thing yet.

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Marguerite Green: So they were like, “We want to do this thing, we’ve named it, we know nothing else about what that looks like, here’s the budget.” So I was hired into that role which we then changed the name to Press Street Gardens.

Rien Fertel: Yeah, and let’s talk about those gardens. Those gardens are meaningful to me cause I actually moved to the last block at Decatur, so about a block or two blocks away from these gardens, at the exact moment that they opened. So I bought a little shotgun house there, which was my house for ten years, in 2014, so right when this was being launched. And NOCCA, the school we’re gonna talk about were my neighbors. They were just half a block away. So describe the urban environment that this garden still inhabits and inhabited then and what the function was.

Marguerite Green: There were these three lots that go from NOCCA’s existing campus — or actually at that moment, when I came on to the team, which would’ve been

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Marguerite Green: well over a full year before we would’ve broken ground at the garden, because I guess I’ll explain why. NOCCA, the original Riverfront Campus, which I had the pleasure of getting to go to as a kid, so that was really fun and a big deal for me. NOCCA’s down there on the river and then there’s this whole block of Press, that’s the block between that immediate building and then I guess that would be Royal right there, that building was mostly an

empty facility, but it was also where the Green Project was and it's where Aunt Sally's Pralines was. So I was hired on to be part of a multi-part project that was they were going to open a garden, an art gallery, and a restaurant, all at the same time. And they had just secured all the funding to take that building, I think they bought it at that point,

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Marguerite Green: and turn it into like another school building, as well as a restaurant. And then I was gonna build out this garden that was gonna have this relationship with the restaurant. So just to name the layers of what the farm was gonna be: it was gonna be a teaching farm for the students, the culinary arts students, but then it was also gonna be the provider of food to the restaurant, and a public education space for the neighborhood, which is awesome. It's great but that's a lot to do in one small area. So then you've got the building and you've got these three additional blocks between that building and St. Claude. So the first block is what we colloquially still call Plessy, and that is because it is the site of the removal and arrest of Homer Plessy from the railroad. I think a lot of people look at the railroad that's there, that would've been the industrial railroad. The individual or what am I trying to say? Domestic? The passenger railroad would actually be under what is now the sidewalk.

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Marguerite Green: And so they would've both been right there, but cotton would've been going on the one that's still there and then people would've been on the left. And there's a big concrete pad on the lot under there, where we call Plessy, under where that mural currently is, like the concrete that's right there. That would've been like possibly the loading zone, on-loading or offloading, or maybe even stock yard right there, we're not sure. And we jacked up some of the concrete and I put trees in there. So the next block was an empty block. All of these blocks were empty. They're the only properties that were not zoned in the city of New Orleans. They had no zoning because they had been owned by Norfolk Southern, almost in perpetuity, forever. There's the empty block, that block had been accumulating a lot of trash. In the immediate post-Katrina years people have a lot of memories of fridges being dumped on it.

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Marguerite Green: But it's a big property and it was treelined. And then the final property, the third property, which is colloquially known as Hubig's by the people who were there at the time because Hubig's had just burned down and there was a possibility Hubig's was gonna move to this site. And we called it Hubig's so many times that it's still called Hubig's. But Hubig's never moved there. So anyway, the block that I was given quote-unquote to turn into a farm was a quarter of an acre and tree lined with a lot of trash trees from post-Katrina, like weeds growing up. And the environment of that neighborhood is really interesting cause it's between the Marigny and the Bywater, which at that exact moment was still, I think, fighting their last moment of gentrification, right, which actually felt really, really tense.

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Marguerite Green: I remember a lot — people would get into fights or like yelling about it. There was a fancy restaurant that Mike Doyle opened called Maurepas, and I remember I sold to Maurepas vegetables, and one night I was delivering vegetables and someone was yelling at everybody who worked there. It was like these moments of how a city — anyway, so the neighborhood felt very tense and had all of these amenities that I think a so many of us weren't used to New Orleans having all of a sudden: cool coffee shops and blah blah blah. I think very much the garden was both a part of that and it was very important to me as a New Orleanian and a person who thinks about place a lot to try to be not thoughtless about being a part of that. So the neighborhood is also bisected by this train.

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Marguerite Green: My husband calls it a vortex for people who are having a hard time and it truly is, I still interact with this space to this day. People are sucked down the train track to the river, almost in a religious way. So people would often stop, and all of these lots had been de facto public right of way for many years, so there was some immediate neighbors, especially the directly next door neighbor, who's definitely a part of New Orleans food history, Roy Guste, rest in peace, really did not want this garden. So yeah, it took a year and a half for me to get the permitting and zoning change for the garden and so many people were big champions of the

garden and then so many people saw it as — it wasn't something that people coalesced around and thought, "That's gentrification!"

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Marguerite Green: But there were just like a few, maybe like ten or fifteen people, who were concerned about it. Most of those people were not New Orleanians. They were mostly folks who were already living in the Bywater-Marigny themselves, which is always that contradiction of someone who was there from New York being like, "Don't put this in my neighborhood!" And I was like, "Where are you from? This neighborhood is actively done, it's gentrified, we're cooked!" So anyway, I think the person who sticks out as really not wanting it, cause they didn't want the last vestige of that sort of like rough Marigny to change, was Roy, who lived in that Mardi Gras-colored house right next to it.

Rien Fertel: So the gardens, it is a success story in the sense that it did open, in my estimation, it did beautify that big corner squeezed between the two neighborhoods. And so I guess I wanna ask

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Rien Fertel: how the students took to it and how the school used it. Was that successful, you think, in your estimation?

Marguerite Green: It was. I think there was a where-are-we-now that is sitting heavy with me in telling those stories, but when that program worked, it was so cool. It was very beautiful. So I worked with the students two or three days a week at the height of it, they would come out, but then we were running it like a pretty big and efficient urban farm. It was functioning as a production farm. And then we were figuring out how to work education into it and then doing a ton of public program, too, which was really fun. That was kind of a playground for us to be able to be like, "Oh, I have a salary and I get to put on dye-making and cooking classes and all this stuff." And they were all free.

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Marguerite Green: But so anyway, the kids were so into it. We got goats from Paradigm Gardens and we had chickens and we had visiting artists from all of the art programs doing collaborative work out in the garden. We had these big plant sales.We had a plant sale in probably 2014 that was — I've seen plant sales pull in that many people since, in this current version of New Orleans, but it was the first time I think an urban farm that had put on a plant sale that was all our — we had grown everything in our greenhouse and potted it up and all that stuff. And we got slammed. I had students there for their volunteer hours, it was a Saturday, working, and they were taking money and at the end of the day I think we made $3,000, which is like whoa, was so cool, from all of the seeds that they had planted and potted up.

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Marguerite Green: But we had all this rare and unique stuff because I had been given a budget to buy whatever seeds I wanted. So at its height it was really cool and very functional. The students at the school did a vote to name the goat baby — our goat had babies and the kids came out and saw these babies that were still wet and they named them. It was really happy. It was really cool.

Rien Fertel: So where are the gardens now?

Marguerite Green: So I left that job because I think any adult who hears what it was is like, "Oh you got burned out." It was running four different programs at once, with a salary that wasn't quite — I wasn't able to make it work.

Rien Fertel: Were you considered a teacher?

Marguerite Green: I was not considered a teacher because the NOCCA institute, which is the non-profit that supports NOCCA, was the operator of all of those programs. NOCCA is a state school, so that's part of the story is that I

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Marguerite Green: quit running the program as a program. I was very much running it almost like Grow Dat, as a non-profit, its own standalone thing with its own employees, its own budget. And I just couldn't do it anymore. So I quit and they had my team play farm team, which my husband was on, took over just running the farm, and then the school hired me to be a teacher. So I started part time teaching at the garden just coming only to the campus, walking the kids down and interacting with that same farm staff, my former staff, and just figuring out what they needed done and being the orchestrator of the educational part. And I did that for three years and it was great, but it really shone a spotlight on this thing of like, programs like that need a director or a robust community of people who are acting as director or whatever. But having these disparate parts, one person's teaching the kids, and one person's —.

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Marguerite Green: It just doesn't sing in the same way. We still, to this day, have a lot of people be like, "How do I interact with this space?" over the fence. And it's sort of like, "You don't." Cause there is a high barrier to how you interact with this space cause there's not one person thinking of all of the programming.

Rien Fertel: When did you leave and where did you go next?

Marguerite Green: I continued to teach part time in that role until 2018, and simultaneously the next thing that I did was I went and took a two month break and taught at the New York

Botanical Garden in the Bronx and learned how to make cheese in New York. I went to New York and just stayed with friends for two months and then I came right back. This was sort of part of the plan. I called a woman named Emily Mickley-Doyle, who has probably come up in some of what you're talking about. She and I had recently formed the Greater New Orleans Growers Alliance together

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Marguerite Green: with several other really wonderful people. And I called her and said, "I'm gonna quit my job at NOCCA today and I'm really afraid of having a gap on my resume. And I know I can landscape, and I know I can bartend, but I had a career. And I would like to keep that continuity. So even if the thing you're doing, which is called SPROUT, can't pay me — cause it doesn't event pay you." It was totally a volunteer thing. I was like, "Can I do what I do with you and be SPROUT with you," basically. And she was like, "Yeah, absolutely, what if we set a goal that we want to support ourselves with this thing." So I took two months off in between, with the intention that when I get back to the city, I'm starting at quote-unquote SPROUT.

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Marguerite Green: Which was like a community garden program, mostly a community garden program and a market. And we're gonna give ourselves a one-year timeline to try to make SPROUT pay our bills. So that would've been 2016 when that happened, or 2017, because I

think actually the election of Donald Trump was like a character in this story. So I was like, "I gotta just go do this community organizing thing with my friends. We gotta build a better world." So I started at SPROUT in July of 2017.

Rien Fertel: What was SPROUT before that? Where was it headquartered? And what did you and your colleagues there build it to become?

Marguerite Green: SPROUT had started as a market garden by Emily Mickley-Doyle and a guy named Matt — oh, my gosh.

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Marguerite Green: What is Matt's last name? [Glassman.]

Rien Fertel: We can add it.

Marguerite Green: Okay, great. So Emily and Matt had started that as a market garden, similar to how I had started my farm. They were just tryna sell produce and, I think, Emily is a magnetic personality and a person who is very thoughtful and intentional about community, militantly so. And so of course, unsurprisingly, she started that bent towards gardening with people, and not making any money, and da da da. And so when the ReFresh Project had started getting formed, they and two other organizations were asked to do all of the gardens on the periphery of the

ReFresh Project. And they were also gardening at Marilyn Yank's Little Sparrow Garden at the time, which was across the street from that Ruby Slipper in Mid-City. So they were selling what they grew there and then what they grew at ReFresh was the community garden.

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Marguerite Green: And they had this really regimented structure for the community garden so that other people could teach and run it. It was very much like they were volunteer leaders. You knew when you had your shift at the community garden. So they were running this tight ship of a community garden that was incredibly age diverse, race diverse, mostly people from that immediate neighborhood, which is not a neighborhood I am from or have any historical connection to. But it was really just like, "Oh these people are really thinking about sense of place and displacement and food justice and sovereignty." And so they were doing that and they were also running the ReFresh Farmers Market, which was, at that moment, in the sort of lobby of Whole Foods right there.

Rien Fertel: On Broad Street?

Marguerite Green: On Broad Street. And I was a vendor at that market at that point too, prior to working at SPROUT.

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Marguerite Green: They had programming, in the sense that they had these community garden classes, they had kids classes, they had the market. It was the structure of a non-profit, just without any formal infrastructure. So that's what it was when I started. Matt had moved on by the time I started. It was just Emily running the ship in a formal sense and a million amazing community gardeners and volunteers. So we built our first board and I started expanding our programs and really started bringing in the things I wanted to do and meshing it with Emily's core vision, which made kind of what we now have at SPROUT. We call it a farmer and gardener technical assistance organization. But what it really does is, essentially, provide material support, resources, technical assistance, and community organizing to farmers and gardeners.

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Marguerite Green: So I really wanted to be more towards regional or statewide, thinking of models like Alabama Sustainable Ag Network or Mississippi Sustainable Ag Network. That was what I wanted to do. And so I brought that energy to SPROUT and we expanded to regional, southeast Louisiana, doing farmer organizing and technical assistance in the region. And then over the eight years that I was there, we actually expanded to statewide and we've built coalitions throughout the state that do that kind of work throughout the state.

Rien Fertel: And who qualified or qualifies — cause SPROUT is in existence still — so who qualifies as a farmer and gardener in this respect and what sort of aid or support or organizing would you help these individuals or groups do?

Marguerite Green: Yeah, so SPROUT focuses specifically on anyone who is growing food, or specialty crops, flowers, proteins, but with the lens of people who have been historically left out of larger agricultural systems.

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Marguerite Green: So what that mostly looks like is its mostly farmers of color, women, and queer farmers. But it's any low income or — it's basically everyone who cannot access traditional models of capital and land.

Rien Fertel: And not just farming to sell right, also farming for themselves?

Marguerite Green: Correct. So that tension that you're naming — cause those two communities often need very different things, people who are growing for commerce and people who are not — is part of what made us structure the organization in 2019. We started moving towards structuring the organization to have departments and those departments being community food. I was the director of the organization for many years as an executive director, sort of sole director role, and Emily became my board president, board chair.

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Marguerite Green: So we sort of continued our co-directorship except mine was in a paid capacity and hers was in an incredible volunteer capacity. And so that tension that you're naming of how are you talking to both community gardeners and for profit gardeners at the same time, meant that we divided into the departments of producers and stability, which was more of a regional department serving farmers who are attempting to grow for commerce, working towards that or in that. And then community food, which handles the movement of the food system in the city of New Orleans, so that's community gardens. That's really almost anything that happens in the city, with the rare exception of like a scaled farm in the city. So River Queen Greens would be an example of who we would call a producer and sustainability farmer, though they are in New Orleans. So it's that intention that divides where a producer goes. And then we also consider admin and operations to be its own department at SPROUT because we're a really process-heavy organization.

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Rien Fertel: So I'm sure you were involved in the lives and work of many, many farmers and growers. Are there any success stories or any sort of stories that really stick out in those years that you spent with the organization?

Marguerite Green: Yeah, I mean one of the programs that we developed pretty early in me coming on to SPROUT is called the Truck Farm Table. **A**nd it was like based on the premise of how truck farming used to work in New Orleans and being able to have a diversified market table from a very small piece of property. So we created this table where farmers from all over the city could bring what they wanted to sell, whether it was they were not a garden that usually sells stuff and they just want some seed money, like community gardens could participate. But people who were trying to scale into the market could participate. So it's this consignment table that we didn't take a cut of. We're creating the labor.

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Marguerite Green: We're selling for people. And that table, over the years — so I think we started it in 2017 and it's still rolling. That table has gone from us selling $100 a market, only in cash and dividing it up between people down to the quarter, to, I think, $38,000 last year. And I think the projection was gonna be $60[,000] this year for small-scale growers in New Orleans. And people bring food in now too. And it has been a lily pad for a lot of people to graduate into their own table. So Major Acre, which was a farm out of Laplace started at that table, and they're no longer farming here, but I met that farm through them coming to the Truck Farm Table then they became a major and amazing farm in New Orleans while they were here.

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Marguerite Green: River Queen Greens started at the Truck Farm Table. But also the person I'm thinking of in this exact moment is the person who became a manager at the Truck Farm Table and still it's her program is Erica Johnson, who runs what's called Petit Jardin, that's the market garden in Central City. She runs the whole program. It has very much become in her image. She has really transformed it from the thing I handed over to her. But she just did this incredible public soil and water conservation district election thing and now vends on her own at the Sunday market. So people have begun to aggregate together at that table. So a lot of CSA people have met each other, and now pack CSAs because they sold together. Some of our community gardeners sell their jellies and jams through it that they make out of the garden. So we have like Dara Duplessis, who is a dear friend of the garden and an original community gardener.

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Marguerite Green: Goes by Mama D at the market and she sells like fig preserves and jellies and jams and guava jelly and carrot and orange marmalade and all of this really wonderful stuff, and she sells it through the Truck Farm Table. I hate to think of it all as in terms of that one program because its commerce based, and there are so many other ways to quantify our connection to each other, but I think that any single person that you named who's growing, I could do the six degrees of Kevin Bacon with and be like, "We met that person here and da da da and they started at Sun Done." Everything is so connected to — I don't know what it even goes back to — but everything is overlapping.

Rien Fertel: You brought up quantifying. Are there any sort of numbers about the number of people who are growing in New Orleans?

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Rien Fertel: What does that look like scaled? It might not exist at all that sort of quantification.

Marguerite Green: I think it does in disparate, in multiple different forms, because there's how people define themselves, there's how we define them, how USDA defines them. But one measure I have — this goes back to all the invisible threads — in 2018 we went and lobbied for the farm bill. Several growers, so myself, Emily, Maggie Kaiser who runs Two Tall Farms, and some folks from the Northshore, went and lobbied for that version of the farm bill. And what we really wanted was this prevision of the farm bill that would have urban ag offices. And we won, we got it, and then they premiered eighteen urban ag offices in the United States, and one of them ended up being for New Orleans, its over there on Bayou Road, so we won this office through —.

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Marguerite Green: When I say won, I mean won through policy and advocacy in 2018. The office opened in 2022 — policy is slow. But they now quantify, they have to categorize who a farm is and get farm numbers, and they count how many farm numbers now exist in New

Orleans. And we have — I think I was told the last time I was in the office — the most growth, we're like MVP or like the most improved player of all the urban ag offices. So we have an astounding number of people who have farm numbers now, which is never gonna be the full picture because a farm number is given to you by the government and a lot of people don't want a number from the government. So we have that as a way of quantifying. SPROUT uses CRM software now to track who we work with, who goes through our urban farmer training programs, who comes to classes,

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Marguerite Green: who accesses technical assistance on land, getting a lease or whatever, so we have numbers there. And then the other metric would be the Greater New Orleans Growers Alliance listserv. So we formed that listserv as just a group of young urban farmers in 2014 or something like that, and we've been able to watch it grow. So I can log in and see how many people are on it — and that doesn't mean that every person that's on it considers themselves an urban farmer, but it's an indicator of community interest and growth. So we started in a living room, I think there was fifteen of us there, something like that, twelve, fifteen of us there, and now that listserv is like 300 people. And its gone through many many — we have formal elected leadership in that group and I haven't been in leadership in that group in like six years. So it's gone through like—it has elections, like it's a whole thing.

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Rien Fertel: If you could pinpoint — this is kind of a big question to ask but I wanna ask it. If you could pinpoint why this has been happening over the past twenty years, or around twenty years, do you really think of it as a post-Katrina phenomenon or is it a national phenomenon, because similar things are happening in other cities, right, and you have the victory of the farm bill to institute these urban departments in cities across the nation. But I'd like to think, at least I pitched this project as something that was uniquely happening in New Orleans post-Katrina. But that's also part of my story because I was here in 2005 and moved back in 2008 and volunteered for a lot of these organizations beginning in 2010. And I've seen them come in go. I've stayed in touch with some, continued to buy food from some, and bought food from some once and never visited again.

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Rien Fertel: And I've had friends in a lot of these organizations. So I've seen a lot of change but I can guess because of your network, it's not just local but national. This is all going back to that original question I asked, is it a local phenomenon is it national, could it have happened without that blank slate of sorts that we had, I hate to call it that, in 2005, 2006? What's happening? What do you see really happening on a big picture level?

Marguerite Green: Oh, so I think it was gonna happen everywhere. This movement of global food, urban ag, that undeniably started happening in 2006, 2005, there's the Forks Over Knives

and Michael Pollen and da da da, Slow Food, and a lot of things were around longer but there are moments they have cultural cache all of a sudden.

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Marguerite Green: There was absolutely something happening nationally, and I say evidenced by I was doing things like this in Baton Rouge. We were at the forefront of starting things like this in Baton Rouge and they had happened in the ’80s and gone away, and so there are movements and that’s undeniable. What we now have and what we had in New Orleans, that sort of era, post-Katrina era to now, is undeniably different than anywhere else. So it’s a both-and for me, of like there was something in the water and we did something extra with it. Because like you said, I don’t know what another expression would be, because of the blank slate, right, it’s a gut-wrenching opportunity. It’s a hard thing to call an opportunity and I would maybe say, I think a lot of the things that were post-disaster

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Marguerite Green: about it actually have weakened with where we are now. I don’t necessarily think that momentum and energy and the people who came to the table when they did, all of those things, I actually don’t think those ended up being good.

Rien Fertel: Right.

Marguerite Green: I don't know where you are with that but for me I think post-Katrina New Orleans attracted a certain kind of person, some of those people are my deepest collaborators and best friends, and it's also undeniable that people who come towards crisis can also often also be — New Orleans can be dominated by big personalities in our urban ag scene. We've joked for years when you sent the email that was like I'm doing this, we were like, "Oh my God, someone's doing it." Cause a lot of us have joked for years that we need like a characters of New Orleans agriculture. Everyone has a story with each other, like literally that guy pushed that person and this person was there,

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Marguerite Green: and it's all so dramatic. Because first and foremost farmers have weird big personalities, serious independent streaks that go back to the American idealism of farming or like the independence of farming. Farmers will always have a mile-wide independence streak. And then those of us who don't have such a communal streak — this is where I find myself — that that's almost militant. I'm a farmer in the way that I'm a socialist. I'm a farmer cause I'm a socialist. And then there are people who are like I'm a farmer cause I'm a libertarian. And that's kind of what you have, so you have a bunch of people with strong ideals that are coming to a place and then their coming to a place that is very chaotic and there's very little regulation. Yeah, so the confluence of what was going on, huge money coming in, and just haves and have nots,

where it was like if somebody was coming in from another city and they talked to the right person in their family they could get like

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Marguerite Green: $40,000 to buy a bunch of land here and then all of a sudden there's a chaotic weird guy who owns a ton of land in the Lower Ninth Ward. And I'm not naming one person when I say that, I'm naming like six different people. So people are opening schools and all of this stuff is happening. It was like a lab. It's like an experiment. And some of those experiments turned out so beautiful and some of them are so unusual and can only make you laugh looking back. And so I guess that is all to say, I would call foul on anyone who'd say this is part of a national story, because what we did here was so specific.

Rien Fertel: Right. And I think you're also speaking to the dynamic that was so evident post-Katrina and, I would say, because I live here, still evident today, is that there has always been and will always be a divide between New Orleanians who you are.

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Rien Fertel: I am not a New Orleanian, I was born in Lafayette, Louisiana. I'm a Louisianan but I've lived here for twenty-five years. You're the first person born in New Orleans that I've talked to for this oral history project. But there can at times feel like a fierce divide between New

Orleanians and people who are coming to the city — often to do good and sometimes with momentum and money and power behind them. I don't know if you want to talk to that. You've kinda been talking about that but, I guess, the picture that you're painting of the past twenty years is like a million different pictures at once, it sounds like a patchwork.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, and the funny thing, you say you're from Lafayette, and I feel like there's been this softening in myself. Which, oh, imagine that, as you get older and you soften and your perspectives become more nuanced. Who thought? But I'm like, "Oh yeah, but people from Lafayette are part of it." I think that there is some level of being like, I for so many years did have a really big chip on my shoulder about not having any friends who are from here and I was like, I'll take anybody. Like, you're from Shreveport, come on. I'd be like, get in my corner, I need more people. But my softening has been realizing that it really just comes down to how people move. I formed an organization that I deeply believed in, with a woman who's from Ohio and who was very much part of that moment that I named, but I saw what she was doing and I was like, "She's real, this is real, this is good." And good is complex and impact is often complex too. You can hurt people when you're doing good. Anyway, I guess it's just a tapestry.

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Marguerite Green: But then I also realize my elders in this movement, when I think of someone like Jeannette. Jeannette is objectively my elder, she took me under her wing, she gave me my access to my first land, and she's not from here. But, yeah, I softened cause I was like this is

more complex than I understand and I'll just keep moving and maybe someday I'll figure it out. And I still haven't but I'm closer to figuring it out, because we all have so many different identities too. Like Jeannette is also an elder black woman who's gonna have a different experience of working against a system than I do. I can learn something from her even though she didn't experience — I can't actually remember if she did — she wasn't here for Katrina. I think actually maybe she was, I can't fully remember. But anyway, that's what I'm saying is we can't flatten people. There is like some utility to being able to know when someone has the right intentions.

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Marguerite Green: I am now married and have a child with an AmeriCorps from Indiana who came here to work in a garden, which is someone who I would've bullied. I would've been like, "Get out of here, leave my city." And now that's my husband and if there's a hurricane we're going to Indiana. So life comes at you, I guess is what I'm saying.

Rien Fertel: So talking about the patchwork that this city is and the state is and talking about politics, you did run for office. And we certainly did run the same circle, but that was certainly the first time that you appeared on my radar and I knew who you were cause I voted for you and I was interested in your campaign. And that's not a way for me to show my support or whatever, but I'm just interested in where that decision came from, to run for statewide office.

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Rien Fertel: So tell me about the office, and you could talk about how much ever you want to talk about here.

Marguerite Green: Cool. I think I decided to run in 2017 and there was like a moment of—. It's interesting you want to talk about it today cause this thing is in the water again. We had just gotten a Trump presidency fairly recently. There's this unique moment when things feel particularly bad and just to put us in a place right now today, the "Big Beautiful Bill" will be passing tomorrow. And I am now in a policy role at Louisiana Food Policy Council and thinking about how that will impact people's ability to eat. And so as things get harder, you start being like, I am a jump-to-solutions person. I don't wanna sit in the problem, I really wanna figure out what are we doing. And so I think I immediately was

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Marguerite Green: using my world view and the only thing I do which is agriculture, what could've made any of this better, how do we build power for working class people, for farmers in this state. And I just started kind of, out of my own level of interest, doing some political power mapping and I don't even know what —. Oh, I know what it was, sorry! In 2018 when I was lobbying for the farm bill, as a farmer, I met a guy from Georgia. Wow, sorry, that feels profound to remember it right now and relate it to that 2018 moment. So we were lobbying for that farm

bill but it would've been the winter of 2017, and I met this guy from Georgia, young guy, a Black peanut farmer and he was like so on it and professional. We were all there with the National Young Farmers Coalition to go talk to our delegations, and we would meet in this middle room to like eat a snack and then go talk to your next senator.

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Marguerite Green: And I started up a conversation with him and I was talking about Louisiana's coastline. We're all sharing our weird things from our states, like, "Our state doesn't actually look like that." Showing people it on a map. And he started talking about his challenges. And I was like, "What do we do? We're just talking to these people who hate us." And there were people running off to talk to Bernie Sanders, cause they were the Vermont delegation. I was talking to this southern Georgia guy and I was like, "We're gonna go beg Bill Cassidy not to kill our grandmas. What do we do?" And he was so presentable, he was wearing this suit, and he was like, "I'm running for ag commissioner." And I was like, "Tell me more." And he said, "I gamed it out. I think we can do X, Y, Z by supporting farmers and making sure that agriculture is part of the backbone of a state that is fighting climate change." He made this elevator pitch to me that I could tell he

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Marguerite Green: had been working on. And I was like, “That’s super cool, I need to find someone to do that for our state.” That’s why I came home and started power-mapping it. I think that was the first time I had googled who our commissioner was and that point I was like, “Oh, it’s that guy I know.” I literally had been at Christmas parties — this is Mike Strain from Abita and honestly is a great guy, no complaints. But I was like, “Oh, we’re not focusing on food production in the state.” And that felt like this moment to me where I was like the things that I care about most in the world are climate change and agriculture, and the middle ground of those two things and how those impact each other bidirectionally. And, of course, where equity and justice show up in those things, which is everywhere, it’s all over. So I was like, this is the role that does that, if it wants to, and right now it doesn’t want to, and that’s my core difference with the administration.

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Marguerite Green: You could do these really good things, you could invest in our communities in these ways, and you have chosen not to and that is your political decision. Mine would be different. And so I had asked a couple other people if they wanted to do it and I think no one had ever thought of it, so people were like, “No.” And I just tweeted that I was gonna do it, I guess, is kind of the extent of it. And then similar to the morning I woke up and started a business, i just researched it and did the next thing. So I was like, “Oh, okay, now I guess I have to go meet the Democratic Party.” And just did the next thing. And once I say I’m doing something out loud, almost like a shame, I have to do what I said I’m gonna do, almost religiously. And so I just did

the next thing in front of me and then all of a sudden it was like I'm running for statewide office. It was kinda like each next step led it to being real.

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Marguerite Green: But the whole idea was truly like, none of our lawmakers are naming climate. That was, I would think, the core. I was really struggling with my climate grief and anxiety in that moment, which running that campaign really helped me move through. I feel like I'm in a pretty good place with my own climate grief and anxiety largely because of things like that. But, as I thought about what my policy positions would be, it became more and more clear that that actually was a meaningful way to impact change. It kept reinforcing itself. Sometimes you make decisions and you get halfway down them and you're like, "Oh, my God, what have I done? This is not even that effective or helpful but I already said I would do it." Every time I would crack open another piece of policy or power that the role had, I was like, "Oh, my God, so we can do this? Oh, my God, this is huge, I think we're onto something."

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Marguerite Green: And I think we were onto something. I think there's something there. I still think there's something there. Yeah, so that's where that came from.

Rien Fertel: The State Ag Commissioner deals with a lot of things, as I only came to understand during your campaign. They are in charge of forestry, the lumber — we have a giant lumber —.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, sorry go ahead.

Rien Fertel: It's a giant business in Louisiana and so they're in charge of that, but you wanted to focus more locally and focus on climate change.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, and I would say I have thoughts and feelings about our timber industry. Mostly we export compressed wood pallets to Europe, it's sort of considered a green industry. It's not, as I'm sure you can imagine.

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Marguerite Green: We're shipping compressed wood pallets overseas to be burned as renewable fuel. But most of our industry is focused on exporting commodity products, also our field products. So you can think about our lumbar and timber industry as one thing, but all of our row crops and all of our commodities that we produce, none of it is really food. Louisiana, to speak of, doesn't really produce food.

Rien Fertel: It's soy and cotton.

Marguerite Green: Yeah, we mostly make soy, cotton, rice, sugarcane, milo, so those commodity crops, the things that are subsidized. Specialty crops, which is what is the broad category that's basically anything you eat, is not subsidized. The government doesn't subsidize the production of those crops in any meaningful way to speak of. I think there are some work arounds. I believed and still believe though it oscillates a little bit, that it's not a zero-sum game,

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Marguerite Green: that I understand that the American agricultural industry was built on subsidy. And I believe in something called parity, which is this idea that I know we cannot take away the subsidy of commodity crops overnight, that would disrupt our global economy. It's not that simple. That's some little dream that I think people who are deeply thinking about the world we've created here propose. Oh, we should just take away subsidy. What I believe is that if we're going to be subsidizing things, we should be subsidizing our food as well. We should have a parity in that subsidy. And then once you've created the ability for people to make a living growing food and feed their communities, then we can start looking at: should we be growing this much milo, should we be growing this much corn, where is our soy going? But you don't have to just immediately divest in commodities to put any attention on specialty crop. You can walk and chew gum at the same time. Not because I think we should continue to have commodity agriculture,

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Marguerite Green: but more because I think that needs to be a slow and meaningful transition, just like any just transition should be. And I just wanted our state to give love to specialty crop production. There are models of that, when you look at California or Massachusetts. And those are triggering state to give a Louisianan as an example. You don't want to go up on a campaign trail and be like, "We should be more like California." That's not what I'm saying. But food is grown in those places and they consider growing food part of their economy. We do not consider growing food part of our economy. We trot it out every now and then as a marketing thing, but we don't grow food here.

Rien Fertel: And that includes the seafood industry?

Marguerite Green: I don't include seafood in that because the department doesn't cover seafood. I actually think of seafood as a pretty good road map of what we should be doing for vegetables. Louisiana has started to love seafood

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Marguerite Green: explicitly again and support our seafood industry. What I am tryna to do through my day job and my life is get us to do that about vegetable production too.

Rien Fertel: So before we wrap up, tell me about the new position you just took and about that organization.

Marguerite Green: Absolutely, so I am the statewide director of Louisiana Food Policy Council. We are an outgrowth of the New Orleans Food Policy Council, sort of backwards. But New Orleans Food Policy Council has existed since immediately post-Katrina. It was a volunteer organization for many years, got its 501(c)(3) in 2018. I was a participant in that food policy council for many years, SPROUT served on that steering committee. And it is the organization through which I co-ran a campaign to get our urban ag liaison for the city of New Orleans. So a really wonderful food policy organization that has specifically served New Orleans. And when I was working on a statewide level,

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Marguerite Green: I was always pulling New Orleans Food Policy Council into doing policy work outside New Orleans, because we didn't — do not have another food policy council. And so my dear friend Alyssa [Hernandez] was running it and we pulled her into a state thing called Greaux the Good, which is market matching. We would pull her into state stuff for farm bill, over and over and over again. So in 2023 we got a big windfall of money from a pharmaceutical company and one of the things that we decided we wanted to do with that money was take food and policy council statewide. At that point it was like Alyssa's gonna run that. Yeah, so we moved this organization to statewide at the middle of last year. And it was sort of simultaneous to

me realizing that I wanted to change where I was tryna make an impact, and so I came on over and became the first statewide director of this organization in March.

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Rien Fertel: Does that mean the organization is headquartered in Baton Rouge?

Marguerite Green: The organization is remote, so we have relationships throughout the state. I have agricultural relationships throughout the state and that's where we're starting. But it is a food policy organization, so we're really working on the buildout of those hunger and nutrition relationships and the seafood relationships because those are part of food policy as well. And really leaning into the connections that we already have built over the past decade in agriculture. So I am currently the staff member and then Alyssa is actually still on the team as well. She became the director of development and she has now moved to Alabama, so she's remote. But we don't want much more staff than that. The council itself is statewide. So the people who give the input and do the lobbying and do the advocacy work, they're from all over the state. So we had our first lobby day

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Marguerite Green: and wrote our first bill this legislative session. And we went to the legislative session, we put this bill up, it's very sweet and palatable and lovely, and then we advocated for a

line item for farmers to support infrastructure and purchasing and all that good stuff for farmers statewide, mostly with a focus for farmers outside New Orleans and rural farmers to build out our food system. And so the legislative session is sort of still wrapping up and we're hopeful that that all goes through.

Rien Fertel: Okay, so I'll put an update in the transcript. I just want to ask one more question. I wanna go back to the first thing we talked about and I wanna add in something that we talked about before I started the recorder. We shared that we both have a kid at the same age. We both have two-year olds — I have an almost two-year old, you have a two-year old.

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Rien Fertel: And you talked about when you were growing up, your mom tried to include you in working alongside her, helping her in the garden. And you brought up that you weren't interested and that you were gonna use that as a lesson for parenting. But at the same time, should we or do you plan on or how do you plan on including your child in the garden, or have you already? How do you plan interesting them in the topics that we've been talking about over the past hour. Cause this is something that my partner and I are definitely wrestling with and thinking about and talking about.

Marguerite Green: We definitely already been including her. So she's planted, she plants already

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Marguerite Green: and she harvests, imperfectly of course. Her first word, if it's not hello-goodbye, was flower. Her dad was working on that constantly cause I think as a gift to me. He was like, "That's a flower, that's a flower." And it was truly, she said, hi and bye and flower. And so I think we've been working on making the magical part of it magical. My mom is a saint and did an amazing job. No notes. And I think that maybe was where I finally went, "Oh, my gosh, this big beautiful world." It started all clicking. And I think of myself just tearing up leaves and trying to figure out the veins and wishing that that had gotten encouraged. And so I think I'm encouraging her to interact with nature how she wants. And her experiences are starting younger than mine did in an explicit way. We have a side gallery and our house is lifted cause it's from before the levee was built,

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Marguerite Green: and so our fig tree is like on the porch right now. It's a six year old fig tree but it's spilling onto the porch. So she goes out there in the morning and she picks figs right there from the porch. And she watches birds eat the figs and she watched a raccoon eat the fig. So we're really like, instead of trying a different trajectory than my mom, we're just trying to amp it up a little bit, and be like, "This is around you all the time, and it's part of the world that you live in." And we're naming things explicitly. There was a really cool thing that they made us do when I worked at Tree, which was that they never let you tell kids the scientific name of plants. And I

don't know how I feel about it. I'm of two minds about it, where I'm like, I kinda want her to know every scientific name of plants. And then I'm like, "Well, that's just a thing that we came up with." So I don't know where I land on that but I think about these things a lot.

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Marguerite Green: How do I make sure that she knows the natural world in a really defined way and then also how do I leave space for it to be like super magical. But we have a pond and there are little fish in it. And so anyway we're just trying to infuse it into every day instead of having it be like mom and dad's thing that's happening near her.

Rien Fertel: I think that's a really beautiful point to end. I wanna thank you for sitting down for this conversation.

Marguerite Green: Thanks for letting me talk about myself for so long, it's usually uncouth.

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