

SARAH ROTZ

Julian M. Szeicz Award for Early Career Achievement

Dr Rotz is currently an Assistant Professor at York University's Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change where she teaches in undergraduate and graduate programs in Geography. Prior to her arrival at York, she was a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at Queen's University (and also held The Royal Society of Canada's Alice Wilson Award for early career female academics as a supplement to that fellowship). Before that, she was a SSHRC Vanier Scholar in the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph (PhD, 2017).



Dr Rotz's research examines the ways in which industrial capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, and patriarchy shape contemporary food systems and farming landscapes. She is at the forefront of scholarship and praxis that seeks to reimagine and transform the Canadian and global food systems with a view to racial, social and economic justice.

Specifically, Dr Rotz's work grapples with key questions being posed by scholars, decision-makers, food growers, workers, and community members: How is the Canadian food system changing as a result of technological intensification, and as a result of the COVID pandemic? How can Indigenous sovereignty and reconciliation be advanced in a context of deepening industrialization and corporate concentration in agriculture? How can agriculture become less dependent on racialized, inequitable, and precarious migrant labour? How can work by and for communities help to build a more just and sustainable food system in Canada? In unpacking these questions, she draws from various perspectives across the social sciences, including critical and digital geographies, food studies, political ecology, and feminist and settler colonial studies.

Dr Rotz's extensive output has included key policy reports, academic publications, popular articles, and digital stories revealing land and labour injustices in the food system. Her academic work has appeared in a range of high-impact international journals in Geography, Rural Development, Food Studies and other fields. These include: *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, *Geoforum*, *Agriculture and Human Values*, *Social Science & Medicine*, *Canadian Food Studies*, and *Sociologia Ruralis*. Despite being just a few years into her academic career, her work has been cited over 600 times. Her co-authored book with Ian Mosby and Evan Fraser - *Uncertain Harvest: The Future of Food on a Warming Planet* (University of Regina Press, 2020) - was shortlisted for the Science Writers and Communicators of Canada 2020 Book Award, and for the Saskatchewan Book Awards, 2020.

Dr Rotz's work stands out not just because of the quality of her scholarship and the urgency of the substantive issues it addresses, but also because of the ways in which she is reimaging and enacting community-engaged research through feminist and decolonial relations of care. She argues that in order to meaningfully advance equitable and decolonial models of food provisioning and land stewardship (e.g. land back, land sharing, and land rematriation) with Indigenous peoples, we need to attend to our relationships both within and beyond the research process – what she

terms “methodologies of relational accountability”. In this spirit she has built ongoing research collaborations with leading food justice organizations including FoodShare Toronto, Black Creek Community Farm, and the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. The latter collaboration resulted in a widely-read report on the abuses faced by migrant farmworkers in Canada during COVID-19.

Dr Rotz’s SSHRC Insight Development Grant (2019-22), titled '*Relational Accountability for Indigenous Rematriation (RAIR): Creating food sovereignty through rematriation, land sharing, and relationship building*' is illustrative of her approach. By taking direction from Indigenous women and two-spirit people to envision and advance decolonial relationship-building between Indigenous/non-Indigenous researchers, activists, and food growers – the project is centring the voices of those who have often been marginalized by research processes.

Dr Rotz has also sought to ensure that her work is shared with policy makers and with the wider public. She has written and spoken for public audiences in a variety of settings including: the National Farmers Union; the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs; FoodShare Toronto; Food Secure Canada; Sustain Ontario; Dieticians of Canada; and Grain Farmers of Ontario. For a wider audience, she has shared her research through media outlets including TVO’s The Agenda; The Globe & Mail; CBC Ideas; Rabble; and Civil Eats.

Meanwhile, at York University, Dr Rotz has been active in advancing access to cultivable land for local racialized communities through a BIPOC Community Land Trust Project and an on-campus community garden. She has also been a leader in advancing institutional responses to climate change by co-chairing the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) Climate Emergency Committee, and as the co-founder of YUFA’s *Climate Talks* seminar series.

In less than five years since her PhD was granted, Sarah Rotz has created a body of scholarship and practice that drives change in Canada’s food system towards a more justice and sustainable future. She has done this through excellent scholarship but has also become recognized as a public intellectual making importance contributions that drive wider discussions of these concerns. Furthermore, she has demonstrated a principled approach to research in which she is acutely aware of the structures of power and privilege in which she works, and holds herself rigorously accountable for a deeply collaborative and caring research process.