

The Challenges Farmers Face at Vancouver Island's Farmers' Markets

by

Kora Liegh Glatt

B.A. Hons., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Sociology

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University of Victoria

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We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSANEC peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

## **Supervisory Committee**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Martha McMahon (Department of Sociology)  
**Supervisor**

Dr. William K. Carroll (Department of Sociology)  
**Departmental Member**

## **Abstract**

Farmers' markets are often thought to be the hallmark of the local food movement. However, there appears to be relatively little research which considers farmers' experiences there. Drawing on 12 open-ended interviews with 16 farmers on Vancouver Island, BC, I explore how farmers' markets support small-scale farmers, although they are losing farmer focus. I explore three key themes in this research: mainstream economic assessments of farmers' markets, how consumer culture affects small-scale farmers, and whether organic certification works for small-scale farmers. The intent of my research is not only to consider farmers' experiences at farmers' markets, but to show how to improve their current organization on Vancouver Island and elsewhere. As such, this refocuses farmers' markets back to local food, small-scale ecological farming, and food sovereignty.

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## Acknowledgments

There are not enough words to thank Dr. Martha McMahon for her careful guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this entire process. This thesis would not be what it is without Dr. McMahon's insights and assistance. Thank you for being patient, believing in me, and most of all believing in the work I am doing. It has been an honor.

To Dr. Bill Carroll, I thank you for your helpful advice, counter points, and overall encouragement in this process. Your expertise has been indispensable in my academic career.

I thank my husband, William, who on top of being a supportive and encouraging partner, spent many vacations, weekends, and evenings parenting solo so I could write.

I thank my two closest academic friends, Kelsea Perry and Suzanne Wood, for your endless moral support, humor, encouragement, advice, and manuscript reading.

Thank you mom, for your constant encouragement, check-ins, and for urging me not to give up.

I thank my mother-in-law, Nelita, who travelled to BC to help with childcare, providing me with two weeks of writing time. She also graciously offered her editing expertise in the final stages of writing, helping me put forward a well-polished piece.

Without having my daughter in the middle of my research, I may have written this thesis in a timelier manner. However, I do believe my analyses benefitted from the extra time for ideas to marinate and come together. Thank you, Robin, for showing me life need not be lived in the fast lane.

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. The same can be said about writing a thesis. To my family, friends, mentors, and the countless others who have cheered me on during this journey – thank you.

## **Dedication**

In memory of my late grandparents, Michael (Mike) Norman and Mary (Mame) Norman.  
Two of my biggest cheerleaders in life and spirit. Thank you for always believing in me.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This story begins with the public's ideal perception of local or alternative food movements and farmers' markets. Such idealism is what drew me to Vancouver Island and local food movement research in the first place. I wanted to understand what makes a thriving food movement and how that could be replicated elsewhere. It was natural for me to assume that any form of local food would begin first with farmers. Without farmers choosing to farm in ecologically sensible and regionally appropriate ways, the modern idea of local food could not exist. Farmers' markets seemed like an obvious place to start. Starting there, I began to question what makes a successful farmers' market, and mostly, whether farmers' markets could possibly fill the large shoes that the public imagines.

Such idealism is echoed throughout some, but not all, academic literature on farmers' markets (Gillespie et al. 2007; Robinson & Hartenfeld 2007; Robinson & Farmer 2017). As is often the case in sociology, it does not take long before idealism falls away and is replaced by what some call cynicism and others call critique. Both idealism and critique are equally valuable in creating a more just world. The critiques of farmers' markets include suggestions that they reproduce neoliberal mentalities (Guthman 2006) and classism (DeLind 2011) and are otherwise charged with being exclusionary along race, ethnicity, class, rural or urban geography, and neighborhood characteristics (Allen 2004; Slocum 2006; 2007; Alkon 2008; Alkon & McCullen 2011; Guthman 2011; Schupp 2017)<sup>1</sup>. On either end of idealism or critique in farmers' market literature, the focus tended to be on the consumer and not so much on the farmer. As Kirwan (2004) points out, the consumer focus came after Goodman & DuPuis (2002) and Lockie et al.

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<sup>1</sup> There are also multiple studies which discuss food safety at farmers' markets (for example Harrison 2017; Bellemare & Nguyen 2018; Roth et al. 2018; Khouryieh et al. 2019; Jiang et al. 2021), however food safety is not within the scope of this thesis.

(2002) made a call to understand consumer motivations for purchasing alternative food.

Although to understand farmers' market success we must also understand consumer motivations, the farmers who largely make alternative food possible ought to have focus in the research as well. This is where my research began.

To develop my research question, I initially followed a thread which focused on the impacts of governance on small-scale farmers and alternative food movements (Delind & Howard 2008; Hofmann et al. 2009; McMahon 2013; Betz & Farmer 2016). I had assumed that food safety policies as well as both public and private governing bodies would carry the greatest influence upon organizing the lives of small-scale farmers. I cautiously submit here that official governance (either food safety or otherwise) did not come up frequently throughout my interviews, however this is not to say that governance does not carry significant implications for small-scale farmers. Instead, what I found throughout the course of my fieldwork, interviews, and data analysis, were more nuanced, harder to define, and somewhat internalized notions of governance. These notions often disguise themselves as the natural ordering of social activities, what Dorothy Smith calls the relations of ruling.

My research shows that farmers' markets are an important venue for small-scale farmers because this is where small-scale farmers earn most of their income. However, there are underlying tensions in how each market is organized.

In chapter two, I begin with a review of farmers' market literature and the existing data on farmers' markets in Canada. In this chapter, I suggest some theoretical considerations in how farmers' markets are understood. Chapter three covers my methodology and research methods.

Chapter four considers how farmers' markets are framed economically. This chapter is the most theoretically dense, however economic themes are suggested throughout the two

subsequent content chapters, which I will review in a moment. In chapter four, I discuss why neoclassical and neoliberal economics are inadequate for understanding farmers' markets, and more specifically, farmers' motivations. While there will always be an aspect of economic motivation behind what farmers do, I suggest that only considering farmers from this vantage point undervalues and depoliticizes what they do. The last part of this chapter pulls upon my interviews with farmers to show how even if there are economic motivations, there is more beneath the surface that is often not considered throughout the literature. I also discuss how current farmers' market organizations have lost sight of the ideologies which inform them.

These economic motivations inform how modern farmers' markets are organized. In chapter five, I consider how the pull to consumer culture is affecting small-scale farmers. In other words, some farmers' markets are losing their focus on farmers and local food. Farmers are feeling the effects of this, especially when farmers' markets do away with farmer priority in their mandate. The lessening of farmer focus stems from a larger organizational issue through the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM). Although farmers expressed the need for vendors other than farmers to create the pleasant and enticing atmosphere of farmers' markets, farmers suffer from the loss of farmer emphasis by appealing to consumer demands to generate interest (such as craft vendors and non-primary foodstuffs). Thus, the farmers' market exists as a site of political-economic and cultural struggles - carried out to a background of sunshine, cheerfulness, and entertainment.

In chapter six, I investigate the recent regulation of the word "organic" in British Columbia. I look at the consultation reports from the BC Government to understand the rationale behind regulating the word. The chapter then moves into discussions with farmers about whether they feel motivated to become organically certified, especially because of the new regulation.

This chapter reveals that many small-scale, ecological farmers, at least on Vancouver Island, feel their commitment to grow ecologically, as well as their commitments to keeping their food priced accessibly for their customers, outweighs any perceived benefit of organic certification.

My research gives us the opportunity to recalibrate farmers' markets to better accommodate farmers. While much of farmers' market research has focused on consumer motives, my research repositions farmers as central to local food movements and farmers' markets.

## **Chapter Two: Farmers' Market Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations**

Farmers' markets tend to be the quintessential venue of local food movements. Over the last four decades, the local food movement's growing presence facilitated a boom of farmers' markets across North America and Europe. For example, from 1970 to 2001 the number of farmers' markets across the United States increased from 340 to over 3000 (Brown 2002), and up to 8669 as of 2016 (Yu et al. 2017). Feagan et al. (2004) document a similar trend in Canada, where the total number of farmers' markets had nearly doubled since the 1980s. This growth of farmers' markets resulted in a wealth of research on their roles in provisioning local food. Yet despite numerous studies, there does appear to be a major gap which skirts past farmers' experiences. Most commonly, the studies center farmers' market consumers and their shopping motivations, the cost of food, contestations over local and quality, farmers' markets as sites of exclusion, and food-safety investigations. In this chapter I review some of these major themes. Before I do this, I must situate farmers' markets within the broader dialogue of alternative food networks (AFNs). I begin by examining the small amount of farmers' market data we have in the Canadian context.

### **2.1 Understanding Farmers' Markets in the Canadian Context**

The data on Canadian farmers' markets is few and far between. Additionally, there is no federally available data on farmers' markets across Canada, making it difficult to measure their effects on Canada's food system, small-scale farmers, and consumers. Where there is provincial data, interprovincial comparisons are non-compatible as the data collection methodologies vary. However, this is not a methodological problem endemic to Canada alone. Brown (2002) mentions similar methodological inconsistencies in the United States which make meaningful

comparisons difficult. With the exception of Alberta, provincial data collection on farmers' markets are facilitated by non-government organizations.

In British Columbia, the total number of farmers' markets increased by 62% from 2006 to 2012, with an estimated economic contribution of \$171 million; New Brunswick farmers' markets increased by 35% from 2009 to 2014; farmers' markets in Quebec increased by 30% from 2007 to 2014; Ontario farmers' markets had an estimated economic contribution between \$641 million to \$1.9 billion in 2008; Alberta has seen direct-marketing sales triple since 2004; Nova Scotia's total number of markets tripled since 2004; and Manitoba's farmers' market sales nearly quadrupled from 2003 to 2008, with a 51% increase in the number of vendors (Lim & Farber in Harrison 2017:76).

The above numbers are telling for a few reasons. First, they confirm that farmers' markets are in high demand and that the number of markets is increasing. Second, farmers' markets are underappreciated by the federal government given its lack of coverage in census data, even with economic contributions in the billions. Further to that point, there are other measures of success to consider that go beyond economic, which are not captured in the limited data available on farmers' markets. Third, the information we have on farmers' markets in Canada is inadequate to capture the experience of farmers and market goers. If farmers are to "know [their] consumer" (Robinson and Farmer 2017: 26), they need a better understanding of how Canadians spend their food dollars. We do know that Canadian food spending increased by seven percent from 2013 to 2017, however this only indicates food purchased from stores or restaurants and not from farmers' markets or other farm direct-marketing sales (Statistics Canada: Detailed food spending). Canadian food spending data from 2013 to 2017 demonstrates annual increases in average household expenditures on types of foods purchased from stores and

restaurants, although it does not indicate food dollars at farmers' markets or other types of direct-marketing venues. Connell (2012) reports that across Canada consumers spend \$32.06 on average at farmers' markets, with British Columbia's average at \$28.81. Nova Scotian customers spend \$16.40 per visit (Crawford & Butler 2014).

Even with an increased presence of farmers' markets in our communities, there remains a steady decline in the number of farmers farming throughout years. Canadian census data shows in 1996 there were 385,610 farmers in Canada, 10 years later in 2016 there were 271,935 – a decrease of 29.5 percent. The census groups the age characteristic of farmers into three groups: under 35 years, 35 to 54 years, and 55+ years. The data show that every five years between 1996 to 2016 the number of farmers in each age category decreased, except for the 55+ group where numbers began increasing starting in 2006. This is presumably a result of those aging out of the 35 to 54 age group. Interestingly, the under 35 age group increased 2.9 percent, from 24,210 farmers in 2011 to 24,850 farmers in 2016. This shows that there was a small surge of new farmers under 35 across Canada between 2011 to 2016. In every province except for Newfoundland & Labrador and Quebec, the same trend is visible for the increase in farmers under 35 (see Table 1, page 7)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1: Increase & Decrease of Farmers Under 35 by Province<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Province</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Percentage Increase or Decrease</b>
<b>Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</b>	30	25	-16.7%
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	145	170	+14.7%
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	315	320	+1.6%
<b>New Brunswick</b>	225	260	+13.5%

<sup>2</sup> There was no census data included in the Number of farm operators by sex, age and paid non-farm work, historical data for Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Statistics Canada. Table 32-10-0169-01 Number of farm operators by sex, age and paid non-farm work, historical data.

<b>Quebec</b>	4,775	4,130	-15.6%
<b>Ontario</b>	6,130	6,610	+7.3%
<b>Manitoba</b>	1,965	2,175	+9.7%
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	4,375	4,425	+1.1%
<b>Alberta</b>	4,550	4,910	+7.3%
<b>British Columbia</b>	1,620	1,825	+11.2%

Statistically, where the number of farmers has consistently decreased across the country from 1996 to 2016, female farmers have increased their comparative percentage to male farmers<sup>4</sup>. In 1996, 74.8% of farmers were male and 25.2% female. As of 2016, 28.6% of farmers were female and 71.3% male. Of the data available from 1996 to 2016, 28.6% was the highest proportion of female to male farmers reported. Likewise, female farmers made up 35.5% of farmers in BC in 1996, increasing to to 37.6% in 2016. Given that McMahon (2002) stated that, “women are overrepresented among very small farms” (p. 2), it is necessary to understand if the increase in women farmers corresponds with an increase in small-scale farming in BC, and subsequently an increase in farmer participation at farmers’ markets.

## 2.2 Alternative Food Networks

AFNs, also known as agrifood movements or alternative food systems, are described as “a diverse group of efforts seeking to create food systems that are more socially and environmentally sustainable than the current capitalist industrial food system (Leslie 2017:731). At the forefront of AFNs are farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), roadside farm stands or farm-gate, U-Pick operations, and more recently, foods hubs<sup>5</sup>. Other

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<sup>4</sup> Canada Census does not give gender options outside of male and female, which is problematic for those who identify outside of the gender binary. I acknowledge that agrofood studies are in desperate need of queering and ultimately to break away from the gender binary. In this instance, my hands are bound by the available census data.

<sup>5</sup> Food hubs are a newer form of AFN meant to increase consumer convenience by enabling online shopping from small to mid-size farms (Johnson et al. 2016:2). During the Covid-19 global health pandemic, in BC for example, many farmers’ markets hosted online shopping platforms for customers when farmers’ market attendance plummeted (CBC 2020). The perceived benefits or implications of this new development have yet to be studied, however I imagine it will change the terrain of farmers’ markets going forward.

terms used to describe AFNS include the local food movement or locavores, the 100-mile food diet, organic foods, ecological farming, civic agriculture, slow food, fair trade, non-GMO, and otherwise. AFNs are often informed by paradigms of food sovereignty and increasingly by food justice.

Food sovereignty “is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Declaration of Nyéléni 2007). Food sovereignty repositions farmers as autonomous against the conventional food system, where farmers have little, if any, autonomy and are subject to the whims of global markets. McMichael (2016) tells us that there is more:

The food sovereignty movement is not simply about peasants, or food; rather, it addresses the undemocratic and unsustainable impact of the contemporary trade and investment regime. It is about reorganizing international political economy, modeling social struggle around democratic principles, gender equity, producer rights, ecological practices, and rebalancing the urban/rural divide. It reconnects the city with the countryside, reformulating the ‘agrarian question’ as a general socio-ecological question, rather than simply a question of class alliances as capital subordinates agriculture (p. 649).

Whereas food justice is defined as “the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality’s root causes both within and beyond the food chain” (Hislop 2014 as cited in Alkon 2014:29). Food justice is more radical than the popular food security framework, by directly opposing neoliberal governance inherent in food security (Holt-Giménez 2010). Food justice looks to the systemic causes of racial, ethnic, cultural, and class-based consumer barriers to healthful foods.

In British Columbia and across the continent colonially called North America, the effects of colonialism cannot be understated on Indigenous and subsequently settler food systems. Matties (2016) states that settler colonialism disrupted Indigenous food systems, which resulted

in “drastic declines in health and vitality of Indigenous social, ecological, cultural, and knowledge systems” (p. 14). Writing in *Resetting the Table: A people’s food policy for Canada* (2011), Kepkiewicz states that Indigenous food systems not only enable Indigenous communities to “sustain and nourish themselves, but indigenous food systems form the basis of all people’s food systems across Turtle Island” (as cited in Matties 2016:14). This perspective appears to be missing in current farmers’ market organizations as well as in the general consciousness of North American food movements. Small reparations have been made in recent years. For example, the British Columbian government returned 78 hectares of land to Tsartlip First Nation which had previously been used as settler farmland (Wilson 2020). With that said, there is much left to be recognized and acted upon in the context of reconciling current and past settler colonial relations with Indigenous lands and communities.

AFNs are said to reject the industrial or “conventional” model of agriculture, otherwise known as agribusiness, a capitalist mode of food production characterized by vast monocultures, a dependency on technological and synthetic inputs, food raised for export, and being both socially and environmentally exploitative (McMichael 2009; Zerbe 2010). In contrast, AFNs strive to re-embed or re-socialize the food system, reconnecting consumers to the farmers who grow their food and vice versa (Hinrichs 2000; Zerbe 2010; DeLind 2011; MacDonald 2013; Johnson et al. 2016). Re-embedding social relations is said to foster a heightened sense of community and is a relational aspect of some forms AFNs that both farmers and customers seem to enjoy (MacDonald 2013:94). Additionally, AFNs may “reinvigorate democracy” by “bringing together the ‘economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of community life’” (Lyson 2004 as cited in Alkon 2008:489). AFNs also have an emphasis on locally grown products, or “re-spatializing” food production (Johnson et al. 2016:1), which claims to be ecologically,

socially, and economically beneficial. AFNs are suggested to be more resilient to the fluxes of international commodity markets than industrial farming (Zerbe 2010:10). AFNs can ensure higher returns to small-scale and mid-size farmers than if they were to try to market their food through conventional venues like wholesaling (Griffin & Frongillo 2003), although this can depend on the geographic location of the farmer and the established presence of AFNs in their community (Hardesty & Leff 2009; Johnson et al. 2016).

However, food academics and activists have expressed concerns about whether AFNs represent a real alternative to the dominant food system. The most usual criticism is that AFNs reproduce neoliberal subjectivities and do little to address privilege – usually conceived as racialized privilege and issues of poverty (eg. Allen & Guthman 2006; Guthman 2007; 2008a; Alkon 2014; McNeill & Hale 2016). These authors highlight other privileges such as economic accessibility, the location of alternative food markets within wealthier neighbourhoods, and spaces that are not welcoming to the working poor or people of color.

Perhaps the most worrisome element of AFNs and any movements or ideologies which fall under that title, is how local and extra-local interpretations of it are interpreted and acted upon. This is especially so when extra-local (or global) iterations of AFNs are taken to mean the local, which may inadvertently erase or neglect the specificities of local as it refers to geographically bound space. On the other hand, is the overemphasis on questioning and investigating the local, without the same attention paid to global food systems. Small-scale farmers cannot bear the weight alone to challenge the mainstream provisioning of food. Instead, we require an investigation into how all actors – states, corporations, unions, institutions, and organizations – can be participants as active as farmers in this challenge. At the local level we are connected to the happenings of the extra-local, and yet engendering action towards

challenging global food becomes exceptionally difficult when we look to the extra-local for solutions. It begs to question, are our understandings of global food production too generalized and homogenous to envision actionable measures and change?

### **2.3 The Benefit of Farmers' Markets**

As the flagship of AFNs (Gillespie et al. 2007), farmers' markets lend to local and sustainable food production and consumption<sup>6</sup>. For local, small-scale farmers, farmers' markets are indispensable to their survival. This is because they provide an even playing field<sup>7</sup> for new farmers looking to establish their farms and/or for farmers who do not have goals of capitalist expansion and exponential growth<sup>8</sup>.

Farmers' markets are one of few direct marketing options for small-scale farmers (Guthman et al. 2006). Direct marketing is characterized by farmers selling what they have produced directly to the consumer, which allows farmers to retain the full retail price of what they sell (Griffin & Frongillo 2003; Robinson & Farmer 2017; Connolly & Klaiber 2019). McMahon (2002) suggests that "direct sales of local organic produce can return up to 80 cents of each food dollar to the farmer" (p. 2). Comparatively, one farmer reported that a wholesaler offered her \$0.40 per head of lettuce, whereas at the farmers' market, she sold heads for \$2.50 each, for a total return of \$2.00. Farmers tend to prefer direct marketing because they associate it with higher degrees of independence in their farm practices and marketing decisions (Wittman et

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognize that local and sustainable are not synonymous (Beingessner & Fletcher 2020:130). Although, for the farmers in my research, the two go hand in hand.

<sup>7</sup> I will demonstrate in the Chapter Five that the "even-playing field" at farmers' markets is only true between farmers, and not necessarily true when comparing farmers to non-farm vendors.

<sup>8</sup> I think the idea that farmers do not necessarily have dreams of scaling up is understated in the existing literature. Many farmers are content to manage the land they have and are not in continuous pursuit of bigger goals.

al. 2012). Aside from economic benefits, farmers find significance in direct marketing because it facilitates “reciprocal connection and personal relations” (Giampietri et al. 2016:3). Direct marketing also includes “consumer cost savings, increased education on the agricultural system, and community development” (Connolly & Klaiber 2019:328; Polimeni et al. 2018). Despite this, local food is perceived to be more expensive than conventional foods, which I will discuss further below.

Through direct-marketing, farmers meet their customers face-to-face. This enables farmers to establish a stable customer base or “regulars”, as farmers call them. Part of farmers’ markets’ allure is the farmer-customer relationship. For farmers, this repositions them as the grower of food – a fact often blurred in supermarket shopping experiences. Customers gain knowledge about who grew their food with the potential to embody food relations (Carolan 2011). The relationship between farmer and customer are often celebrated for recreating a sense of community and re-embedding social relations in food systems. Hinrichs (2000) states that social embeddedness “in this sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust, is often seen as the hallmark (and comparative advantage) of direct agricultural markets” (p.296). Other research considers the social support farmers and consumers offer to each other after establishing their relationship (Garner 2017). However, Hinrichs (2000) also suggests that the relational aspects of farmers’ markets do not rule out farmers’ instrumental motivations, although it is important that we do not see the instrumental motivations as a bad thing<sup>9</sup>. Farmers, like all of us, require money to live.

Through building connections with customers and finding regular customers, farmers’ marketing avenues increase. Some farmers are content to continue selling through one reliable

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<sup>9</sup> I cover these considerations in Chapter Four.

“income market” or at multiple farmers’ markets while others go on to establish a CSA box with their regulars as subscribers. Many farmers facilitate farm-gate sales with regulars, especially for “high-risk” products (by food-safety standards), such as meats and poultry, which can be challenging to sell at farmers’ markets. Such products are difficult to sell at farmers’ markets because they require farmers to transport a freezer, which requires the market have access to electrical sockets with sufficient power supply.

However, not all believe that direct marketing is more lucrative for farmers than wholesaling. Instead, in California, researchers found that a farm’s potential earnings depend upon farm size, labour costs, the presence of well-established and well-attended farmers’ markets in a community, and other regulatory certificates (Hardesty & Leff 2009). Wittman et al. (2012) reported that small-scale farmers ranked wholesaling and large retail businesses poorly compared to farmers’ markets, farm gate, and CSA operations. Wholesaling and large retail businesses were associated with “higher economic risk, lower financial returns, increased regulations and standards, demands for larger volumes and sustained supply, and overall, a more competitive environment” (Wittman et al. 2012:50). To sell wholesale in Canada, farmers require Canada Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, costing \$600 per 4-year cycle, a \$263 annual audit fee, and a \$50 annual charge to support the Canadian Horticultural Council (Canada GAP: Certification Costs). These costs are often prohibitive to new and even established small-scale farmers. Clarence, a greenhouse vegetable farmer, was the only farmer in my research to have sold wholesale prior to selling at his farmers’ market. He shared his experience in selling wholesale and his subsequent transition to selling at a farmers’ market:

[The farmers’ market is] good income wise, much better than wholesaling, we were wholesaling literally a whole area of the greenhouse which is about three quarters of an acre greenhouse and quite a few years either didn’t make money or lost money in a few of them. And that was pretty tough to take. But we managed to get things under control

and get to a point where we could reliably make money. But I can make the same amount of money using less than half the space of the greenhouse selling through farm markets and I don't have to hire people to do it... when we were doing wholesaling it was different, because the stores demand some certification, food safety certification, and we had to get involved in the Canada GAP program.

- Clarence, greenhouse vegetable farmer.

Clarence's experience demonstrates that perceived benefits of different marketing venues do not necessarily transcend international borders to be representative of all farmers' experiences. This means that what may be beneficial to small-scale farmers in Canada may not be for small-scale farmers internationally, and this may even be true about the experiences of farms inter-provincially. The specifics of experience and place must be kept in mind when creating or reshaping local versions of extra-local phenomena, which identifies the need for more research on farmers' experiences in Canada.

#### **2.4 What has the research covered?**

Schupp (2017) identified three themes across farmers' market research: consumers and their motivations, what farmers' markets mean in the context of local food movements, and lastly whether markets reach the goals set forth by the local food movement. Figueroa-Rodríguez et al. (2019) identified four major themes in their bibliometric study of farmers' market literature. These areas include "consumers and vendors, economic impact, social impact, and farmers' markets as research sites" (Figueroa-Rodríguez et al. 2019:2). Some research areas such as food safety (Harrison 2017; Yu et al. 2017; Bellemare & Nguyen 2018; Roth et al. 2018; Khouryieh et al. 2019; Jiang et al. 2021) and tourism (Farmer et al. 2014; Dodds & Holmes 2017) will not be covered in my review.

Kirwan (2004) tells us the call from Goodman & DuPuis (2002) and Lockie et al (2002) to study consumer motivations at farmers' markets inspired a wealth of farmers' market research.

Though, Goodman & DuPuis did warn that the consumer perspective was only one of many perspectives to be considered (as cited in Kirwan 2004). Consumers are often motivated by perceptions that farmers' markets provide quality and/or fresh foods (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Kirwan 2004; Kirwan 2006; Feagan 2007; McEachern et al. 2010; Smithers & Joseph 2010; Carson et al. 2016; Giampietri et al. 2016; Schupp 2017; Pilař et al. 2020). Some consumers see shopping at farmers' markets as a political statement that aligns with their values toward creating an anti-capitalist world (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Feagan et al. 2004; Kirwan 2006; Alkon 2008; Carson et al. 2016). Many customers mention that the local nature of the food's production is important to them (Feagan et al. 2004; Kirwan 2006; Feagan 2007; Alkon 2008; McEachern et al. 2010; Smithers & Joseph 2010; Carson et al. 2016; Pilař et al. 2020), which is linked to health benefits (Alkon 2008; McNeill & O'Hale 2016; Schupp 2017; Pilař et al. 2020) as well as environmental concerns (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Feagan et al. 2004; Feagan 2007; Alkon 2008; Carson et al. 2016; Giampietri et al. 2016; Schupp 2017; Pilař et al. 2020). Some of these environmental concerns link into consumer's preference for organic or no spray agriculture (Alkon 2008; McEachern et al. 2010; Smithers & Joseph 2010; Carson et al. 2016; Pilař et al. 2020). For many consumers, the relationship they build with farmers entails elements of trust (Feagan et al. 2004; Feagan 2007; McEachern et al. 2010; Smithers & Joseph 2010; Carson et al. 2016; Giampietri et al. 2016; McNeill & O'Hale 2016; Schupp 2017; Pilař et al. 2020) which is layered with concerns for equitable outcomes for farmers (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Kirwan 2006; Alkon 2008; Toler et al. 2009; Carson et al. 2016; Giampietri et al. 2016; Schupp 2017; Pilař et al. 2020). Other consumers see their participation at farmers' markets as a status symbol or as a form of cultural capital (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Smithers & Joseph 2010). And for many customers, the pleasurable shopping experience is taken into

consideration (McEachern et al. 2010; McNeill & O'Hale 2016; Carson et al. 2016; Pilař et al. 2020).

Other research considers the economic benefits of farmers' markets. Guthrie et al. (2006) found that farmers' markets are significant to rural economic development in New Zealand. Farmers' markets also contribute to rural communities "by keeping dollars local, build social capital, make small family farms more viable, and preserve rural landscape amenities" (Oberholtzer & Grow:2003 as cited in Schmit & Gómez 2011:119). Research in British Columbia shows that from 2006 to 2012 farmers' markets' provincial economic benefits increased from \$69 million to \$170.4 million (Connell 2012). In Basque County, Spain, farmers' markets are suggested to add 76.5 million euros to their GDP (Malagon-Zaldua et al. 2018). As previously mentioned, some literature considers the economic benefit to farmers through retaining full retail price of their products (Griffin & Frongillo 2003; Kirwan 2004; Robinson & Farmer 2017; Connolly & Klaiber 2019).

Some farmers' market research has focused on lines of exclusion. More specifically, they consider how certain barriers, like race, culture, class, and location, prevent certain populations from accessing farmers' markets. Alkon (2008) found that a farmers' market located in a lower income area had a high turnover of farmers participating due to lack of sales. Two farmers' markets located in low-income areas were well received and said to positively benefit the community (Ruelas et al. 2012). Alkon (2012) considers the ways that sites like farmers' markets focus on social change for economic growth, however this social change does not overtly address issues of race and class. This analysis is similar to critiques of white feminism, where white women gained rights, yet women of color were generally unaccounted for. Guthman (2008) found that people of color participate less in Californian farmers' markets and CSAs because of

exclusionary practices in their management. A USDA study of farmers' markets found market goers to be 74 percent white, 15 percent African American, five percent Asian, and six percent Hispanic (Guthman 2008). Although farmers' markets tend to have more ethnic diversity than CSAs because they "closely mirror the demographics of the area in which they are located" (Guthman 2008:392). The few markets that do exist in African American neighbourhoods tend to be very small (Guthman 2008). Slocum (2008) theorizes how race is made and remade through practices at farmers' markets. Schupp (2017) reported three studies<sup>10</sup> that found that consumers tend to be white and overwhelmingly female. These studies also found that consumers "tend to be slightly older and more educated than the average US resident" and belonging to "the middle or upper class" (Schupp 2017:325). Market managers estimate at least half of their customers are middle-income and a quarter low-income (Guthman et al. 2006). 83 percent of these market managers felt inclined to help low-income populations, however currently they fall short of this goal (Guthman et al. 2006).

There is a considerable amount of research from the United States which considers coupon nutrition programs, such as SNAP, in helping vulnerable communities access farmers' market foods (Dannefer et al. 2015; Saitone & McLaughlin 2018; Cohen et al. 2018; Ritter et al. 2019; Walkinshaw et al. 2018; Rockler et al. 2020; Zhao et al. 2020). As of 1998, farmers' markets only accounted for 0.02 percent of food stamp redemptions (Guthman et al. 2006).

Wheeler et al. (2014) found that asparagus, broccoli, cucumbers, green beans, tomatoes, onions, peaches, and raspberries were priced higher at farmers' markets than grocery stores in California. O'Kane et al. (2019) found significant price differences between only seven of the 30 foods investigated across food retailers and farmers' markets in Australia. Although, farmers'

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<sup>10</sup> Aguirre 2007; Govindasamy et al. 1998; Kezis et al. 1998.

markets sometimes had lower prices than their retailing counterparts (O’Kane et al. 2019). However, other research suggests that farmers’ markets are no more expensive than supermarkets. In Romania, Polimeni et al. (2018) found farmers’ markets to offer lower-priced foods than supermarkets. In Waterloo, Ontario, Donaher & Lynes (2017) discovered that most foods at farmers’ markets are comparable to supermarket prices, with only a few specialty items with a higher price tag. Alkon & Vang (2016) report lower prices at a California farmers’ market. Lucan et al. (2015) report that several other studies<sup>11</sup> also found farmers’ market foods to have lower prices. The polarity in this evidence helps us to understand that farmers’ market food costs are specific to place and cannot be characterized more broadly.

## 2.5 Theoretical Considerations

All things considered, there is little scholarly work to theorize *how* farmers’ markets and/or AFNs can be made more accessible and equitable<sup>12</sup>. This seems to be a familiar impasse in the social sciences, as scholars identify and critique all the parts of a phenomena that are imperfect, and nearly use it as an excuse to not proceed with or, at least amend, whatever that phenomena is. As a graduate student, I often find myself wondering if critique of alternatives without intent and aspiration to improve these alternatives, is in and of itself politically conservative in its impact. If critique is only used with the intent to critique, then I find it difficult to see how it serves any other purpose than to dampen spirits and imaginaries, and to make us collectively subservient to the global capitalist system through persistent demoralizing.

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<sup>11</sup> Larsen & Gilliland 2009; Lee et al. 2010; McGuirt et al. 2011.

<sup>12</sup> One exception to this is the edited book: *Food Utopias: Reimagining citizenship, ethics and community* (2015) by Paul V. Stock, Michael Carolan, and Christopher Rosin.

With the spirit of purposeful critique in mind, I want to continue the rest of this section by filling in the necessary gaps that the critiques of farmers' markets leave out.

For some, farmers' markets suggest a kind of food purism around local, organic, environmentally friendly, and healthfulness. This elicits questions around purity politics, those being the questions of our collective "ethical and political situation in the world" (Shotwell 2016: 5). These ethical and political situations where we are "complicit, implicated, [and] tied to things we abjure" (p. 7) require us all to make ethical "concessions" (p. 7). To shop or sell at a farmers' market does not absolve any individual or collective complicity in a more complex food system. While interviewing a family of farmers, one of the farmers came into their house with multiple bags of groceries from a supermarket. Whether it was the time of year or that the things they bought could not be grown here, I am not sure. The point being, despite this family's strong outward political stance against the dominant food system, they were required to make concessions for access to food. Recalling this moment during my interviews reminds me of our mutual complicity in the ordering of the food system. Purchasing from a supermarket does not imply inherent badness or goodness on the part of the farmer or anyone (most of us) who purchase some or all their food from supermarkets. To infer "purity" of local, small-scale farmers, of marketgoers, or of farmers' markets in general, is to willfully ignore our past, current, and future complicity (Shotwell 2016) in the industrial food system. Forms of assumed purity, goodness, or better-than-ness detract from the realities of systematic compliance and inevitable participation in food systems that purity discourses try to, but cannot, distance from.

On an anecdotal and a personal level, the narratives of goodness or better-than of something like the farmers' market have and continue to be (although less so) off putting. Raised in a single-parent, working-poor family, and at one-point living on government assistance,

household purchases were made on a bargain-basis, not a goodness-basis. I think that is where many families in Canada sit when it comes to making purchases. When I moved to St. John's, NL, for my undergraduate degree, I did not visit the farmers' market until my senior year. I recall being surprised at how affordable the food was priced - I had always thought it would be out of my budget, especially a student budget. The rhetoric around farmers' markets had made me feel like I would never be able to afford to buy things from there. The trouble with listening to narratives without your own investigation is that they may not reflect reality. For someone living in poverty, you do not go places where you cannot afford things because it makes you feel bad, you avoid places where you think you do not belong. It contributes to that cyclical cycle of poverty and dispossession - people who cannot afford to spend more have no choice but to buy food from supermarkets where the food comes from a system predicated on exploitation, picked and produced by underpaid and overworked farm labourers.

So how do we contend with implied goodness or badness of food? In short, I think it is necessary to distance our discourse from conceptualizing anything as inherently good or bad. The sentiment Shotwell (2016) gets at in her book is that for most anything in our lives, we exist in a moral gray area where it is not so easy for something to be so good as to be pure or so bad as to be evil. The existing narratives of farmers' markets works to set people apart according to class. Anything that lends to poverty shaming has no room in a movement for liberation and sovereignty. Throughout my interviews, farmers consistently expressed that they wanted to keep the food they raise as affordable as possible, largely because they knew many of their customers stretched their budgets to shop there. This is an excellent juncture to turn to how food at farmers' market falsely appears expensive.

Largely, the food available at farmers' markets can appear to be economically inaccessible because it is truer to the real costs of food growing and raising. Food at farmers' markets is not made cheap through under-compensating farm labourers or cutting environmental corners. Importantly, most of the farmers in my study *would not have received minimum wage* for the work they do should the number of hours worked be factored into their bottom line. To survive economically, small-scale farmers have *needed* to accept lower prices for their food because of the juxtaposition of food costs to food produced under the industrial food system (Leslie 2017). Yet, despite the struggle to stay economically viable, small-scale farmers persist and keep on farming. This is not to suggest that these farmers are martyrs. Rather, they profoundly believe in a food system not predicated upon a variety of exploitations, and in many cases are willing to forego the enticing rewards of capitalism to prove that point. The work of small-scale farmers is often understated because what they do stands in contrast to capitalist logic that seeks to maximize profits without an equal distribution of that wealth.

To address concerns of farmers' markets being economically inaccessible for consumers, in 2017 the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) introduced the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program. The program relies upon financial contributions from community partner organizations to offer \$21 per week for lower-income families, pregnant people, and families<sup>13</sup>. Four farmers (25%) of my respondents noticed a significant number of people using these coupons, indicating that the coupon program is effective, albeit limited, to helping transcend socioeconomic barriers to farmers' markets. While this sort of program is neoliberal in the sense that it is facilitated by a third-party organization, it does begin to expand the reach farmers' markets have and demonstrates potential for a more equitable food

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<sup>13</sup> <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/coupon-program/how-it-works/>

system. It also demonstrates that farmers' markets organizations are listening to the critiques about farmers' markets and are actively looking for ways to address them.

Here is where we can forge different pathways and approaches to understanding our social worlds. Is it that farmers' markets reproduce social inequalities? Or is it that farmers' markets make visible the hard to swallow disparities in wealth distribution, a capitalist system dependent upon exploitative labour and environmental practices, and a neoliberal system which reinforces conceptions of the individual as only responsible for ourselves? A capitalist system which touts that it will feed the world while simultaneously allowing for massive amounts of food to go to waste because they would not turn a profit on it if it were just given away. Whereas many small-scale farmers donate what they cannot sell by the end of the day at the farmers' market to foodbanks instead of letting it go to waste (Hardesty & Leff 2009:31). I do not believe that farmers' markets alone can address these systematic inequalities as they are not endemic to farmers' markets. However, farmers' markets do keep alternatives alive so that there are possibilities for a different future and a more equitable world (Feagan et al. 2004).

However, I believe there is a disjuncture between what farmers' markets hope to accomplish versus if and how these markets encourage their customers to engage with food differently. A different engagement with food would theoretically benefit farmers, customers, the larger humanity, and the more-than-human world. Many people who attend farmers' markets do not wish to engage with the messy entanglements of food politics – yet will the food system improve without engaging in them? Small-scale farmers have no choice but to and do so in practice. Most of the farmers in this study held somewhat of a food politics attuned to their morals and values. Yet small-scale farmers are asked to nearly lob off a whole part of their personal politics to secure their participation in an economic system in which they cannot fairly

participate, even at farmers' markets<sup>14</sup>. This partly results from the narratives that exist about farmers' markets, according to which the customer is seen as doing the farmer a favor by supporting them, but not vice versa. A better food system starts by letting small-scale farmers take the wheel, instead of letting the market be driven by consumer demands.

I believe it is better suited to say farmers' markets show that it is possible to establish a food system that is not predicated on environmental racism, exploitative labor, ecological destruction, and systemic inequalities. Farmers' markets' potential need not be discredited by their shortcomings, rather these shortcomings can inform what future farmers' markets might look like. Stock et. al. (2015) encourage food scholars to not throw the baby out with the bathwater when outcomes of food ventures like farmers' markets do not live up to utopian expectations. Farmers' markets need not be steadfast in their organizational form, and thus can evolve to address current shortfalls.

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<sup>14</sup> More on this in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology – Preparing the Stall**

### **3.1 Situating the Research**

The inspiration to investigate farmers' markets' regulatory environments stemmed from Dr. McMahon's 2011 article "Standard fare or fairer standards: Feminist reflections on agri-food governance". Her article discussed the enforcement of meat inspection regulations across British Columbia (BC) in 2007. These regulations shuttered many small-scale meat processing abattoirs across the province. Small-scale animal farmers were affected by the difficulty to find meat processing facilities, particularly in rural areas. As a result, many small-scale farmers folded their businesses.

After several informal conversations with Dr. McMahon, I began to gain insight into the experiences of small-scale farmers at BC farmers' markets. The idea to research farmers' markets from the perspective of farmers' regulatory experiences emerged from Dr. McMahon's personal experiences as a small-scale farmer who sells at farmers' markets and her insights towards the effects of private agri-food governance on such farmers. I came into the Master's program with an interest in agrifood governance, hence my inclination to study regulation. To me, farmers' markets appeared as the quintessential place to find small-scale farmers. After a brief farmers' market literature review, I noticed that a considerable portion of farmers' market research has centered on consumers rather than on farmers themselves. For this reason, I felt it important to focus my research on farmers' experiences specifically. Tunnicliffe (2011) also identified the need for farmer-centered research on Vancouver Island.

### 3.2 Limiting the Geography

To determine which farmers' markets to include in my study, I looked at British Columbia's regulatory bodies. There are five health authorities in the province who are responsible for food safety regulation including: Fraser Health, Interior Health, Northern Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, and Vancouver Island Health Authority. I selected farmers' markets that operate within the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), as there is a high concentration of farmers' markets in this relatively small geographic region, and of course, for ease of access because I live on Vancouver Island. The BC provincial website boasts that: "often, farms in this region are smaller and specialized, supplying local and tourism-oriented markets as well as those on the mainland."<sup>15</sup>

### 3.3 Locating Farmers' Markets

After limiting the geography for my research project, I turned to the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM). As of 2017 the BCAFM had 147 farmers' markets registered across the province. Their database allows users to search for farmers' markets based on ten geographic regions. The database showed 30 registered farmers' markets on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. In addition to the 30 farmers' markets registered with the BCAFM, seven additional farmers' markets appeared when I searched for "farmers' markets Vancouver Island" in Google's search engine. These markets were not registered with the BCAFM. To be included in the research sample, markets needed to self-identify as a farmers' market.

Thirty-seven farmers' markets were considered for the project. Of the 37 markets identified, I attended 16 markets from July to September 2017. I attended each market once.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/agricultural-regions/vancouver-island>

While the markets attended were selected randomly, I ensured adequate representation of markets outside of the Capital Regional District and Cowichan Valley. These regions have a high concentration of farmers' markets. The southern part of the island sees a higher concentration of farmers markets, becoming increasingly sparse as one travels north.

### **3.4 Finding research participants**

For each market I attended, I approached every farmers' stall present on that day. I introduced myself as a University of Victoria Master's student and explained my research project and interest. I asked each farmer if they would like to participate in my research. I explained that interviews would not be conducted at the market itself, but at a later, scheduled time. If a farmer agreed, I would give them a business card with my name, e-mail, and phone number. I also collected their e-mail, name(s), and farm name. Farmer contact information is stored and secured on an encrypted external hard drive. In total, 53 farmers agreed to be contacted for an interview. It was less often the case that a farmer rejected my request. I did not document the total number of rejected requests.

After I canvassed for participants, I contacted each farmer individually via e-mail. Not all farmers returned an e-mail to set up an interview time. Three scheduled interviews did not show for their interview. Interviews were scheduled from November to December 2017 after most farmers' market operations had shut down for the year and the farmers were in their off-season.

### **3.5 Developing Research Questions**

With help from my supervisor, I developed a list of 12 questions (see appendix A). I asked for Dr. McMahon's input in developing these questions as I am not (yet) a farmer myself.

Carolan (2011) describes that as a non-farmer, farmers may request agrifood researchers to justify our interest in the field. For this reason, as a non-farmer researcher with an interest in local agrifood systems, I wanted the questions I asked farmers to be relevant to the farming experience. These questions assisted me to keep the conversation relevant and to cover necessary points, such as demographic details of the farmers. These questions generally worked more as an ice breaker to help get the conversation flowing. Once farmers began talking freely, I let them guide the conversation to what felt relevant to their farmers' market experience.

### **3.6 The interviews**

In total, I interviewed 16 farmers in 12 separate interviews. Farming families were interviewed together in an informal setting. Most interviews took place at the farmers' home, with a few happening in a public setting such as a café. On average, the interviews were 60 minutes in length.

For the interviews I wanted farmers to feel comfortable talking about their farmers' market experiences. My research approach was inspired by Dorothy Smith's (2005) institutional ethnography, where the knower is the expert of their own experience. In this sense, I saw the farmer as the expert of their own lives. I wanted the interviews to feel conversational. For that reason, I approached the interviews in an open-ended fashion. Although I had an ear to regulation, I encouraged farmers to talk about whatever they felt was important for them to discuss. All interviews were recorded to a voice recorder. After uploading interview recording to my personal laptop, the interviews were deleted from the voice recorder. Recordings are stored on a password protected, encrypted external hard drive.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Before I could analyze my interviews, I first needed to transcribe them. I transcribed all interviews into individual Microsoft Word documents. These anonymized interview transcripts were stored on a protected, encrypted external hard drive.

Interview documents were uploaded to qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. I chose to code inductively, which allowed me to stay close to my data, emphasize farmers' experiences, and to keep with institutional ethnography's ethos that the farmer is the expert of their own experience. This allowed me to understand what farmers' themselves see as problematic in their farmers' market experiences. The interviews were initially coded three times each. After these initial codes, I focused my coding categorically (Lofland et al. 2006: 201). I collapsed 52 codes into ten themes that characterize the data (see Table 2). This allowed me to map out connections and generate a framework for discussing the problematics farmers face at farmers' markets.

**Table 2: Code Groups – Including Number of Passages Coded Per Group**

Economics & Making a Living (69)	Farmer & Consumer Relationships (20)
Regulation (in/out of farmers' markets) (48)	Value of Food (19)
Defining Local/Local Food Movement (29)	Quality Food (17)
Farmer Values (29)	Importance of Farmers' Markets (15)
Organic Certification (27)	Crafters (15)

### 3.8 Selecting Quotations for the Written Report

For each code, NVivo generates a document with the selection of coded text. While developing the analytical story for each chapter, I considered each quotation within the appropriate code group. I work best by mapping things out on paper, therefore I printed out the quotations as identified by their interview number (see Appendix C). Each chapter topic was

assigned a color. Using the color assigned to each chapter, I used a matching highlighter to identify the quotes which best illustrated the theme of the chapter. Selecting which quotations to use was a non-linear process, as sometimes ideas and connections emerged during the writing process. To manage this, I would revisit the coded themes to select a quotation where a farmer made a certain point to insert it into the report.

Some farmers were more forthcoming in their responses whereas others seemed more reserved. For this reason, some farmers are quoted more frequently because they were able to best articulate their points and speak to the overall themes. I do not believe that the findings are skewed by these respondents. Instead, based on their demographic data, experiences as farmers, and involvement in their organization, I suggest that these farmers were better equipped to effectively communicate the themes that other farmers spoke to in a less direct way.

### **3.9 Confidentiality**

All participants were given pseudonyms when I transcribed the interviews. This maintained respondent confidentiality which allowed farmers to speak freely about their experiences without fear of repercussion. Additionally, the markets I attended will not be identified so that respondent identities may not be deduced from this manuscript. All respondents were informed that any identifying information would not be used in my written or verbal reports, however the risk of being identified still exists within the farming community.

As per my Ethics Board application (see appendix D), all interview data and files are stored on a password protected, encrypted external hard drive. For extra security, all files and information within the files were anonymized, in case of a potential privacy breach. Any printed

documents were also anonymized. Once analysis was completed, printed documents were shredded.

## Chapter Four: The Trouble with Framing Farmers' Markets Economically

*As I sat at a stop light along my morning commute to my office, I noticed an advertisement upon the side of a city bus. It had a picture of a happy woman farmer with the words "Support the farmers who grow your food. Buy BC Local". Once at my computer, I opened the Buy BC website. The website tells me "buying BC Benefits the Local Economy" and "buying B.C. celebrates nutritious meals grown from our very own backyard, while supporting local farmers and producers, communities and the environment at the same time." The website does not tell us about the economic benefits for farmers, or much about the farmers at all aside from the "fresher" and "tastier" foods they cultivate. How can we support farmers if they are lost in ad campaigns? Is "voting with our forks" enough to economically and morally support our farmers?*

Farmers' markets are commonly understood to help local economies grow and financially support small-scale farmers. While partly true, these ideas are also somewhat misleading. These deceptive ideas lend to an underlying tension in how we value farmers' markets in public discourse. On the one hand, experts primarily value farmers' markets through their economic contributions to national, provincial, and/or regional economies<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, much like the bus advertisement described above, how we value and acknowledge the work of small-scale farmers involves imagery, marketing, and fantasies of how many would like the world to be. Support-your-farmer stories may unintentionally disadvantage the very farmers they intend to help by neglecting farmers' basic issues. Such issues include the internal organization of farmers' markets or when public campaigns omit food sovereignty politics. My research begins to document these issues.

In popular and academic discourse, there is a great deal of emphasis on farmers' markets' economic, social, and environmental contributions to their community, but relatively little on

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<sup>16</sup> In 2006, British Columbian farmers' markets had an estimated economic impact of \$118.5 million (Connell et al. 2006 as cited in Wittman et al. 2012). Farmers' markets contributed \$1.3 billion across Canada in 2009 (FMC 2009 as cited in Wittman et al. 2012). A 2019 news article boasted the economic success of farmers' markets across Canada at nearly \$1.5 billion (Goodman 2019).

how farmers' markets and customers can best support their farmers. Within this discourse lives the impression that local food is more expensive and primarily for affluent populations. Some persuasive evidence recently emerged to challenge this belief (Donaher & Lynes 2017). My attention to discourse is partly informed by my own life experience having grown up low-income. I felt discouraged from shopping at farmers' markets because of the omnipresent assumption that the food there is expensive, until I finally visited one myself. Except for Cotter et al. (2017), this topic is brushed over or hardly mentioned in farmers' market literature. For example, Robinson and Farmer (2017) share that perceptions of expensiveness or exclusivity dissuade some consumers (p. 25). Farmers' market discourse is thus political for both farmers and consumers across many intersecting social categories. However, here my focus is not on consumers, it is on the farmers themselves.

I argue that a continued focus on what small-scale farmers charge for their food demoralizes and undervalues the work they do while mystifying the exploitative realities of what Carolan (2011) calls global food. This makes alternatives to global food seem like a niche for affluent consumers rather than as indicators of more ecological and socially just food systems. When supermarkets do sell local food, it is usually restricted to a few items and priced below its true market cost of production. Not only this, but local farmers only make pennies on the dollar when they sell wholesale (Griffin & Frongillo 2003). For example, one farmer reported that wholesale offered her \$0.40 per head of lettuce, as opposed to the \$2.50 per head she charged at her farmers' market (at that time). The realities of farmers' issues are lost in the current discourse. This is important because discourse, whether factually grounded or not, informs both consumers and farmer what to expect of small-scale food.

I suggest that we need better economic frameworks with which to talk about farmers' markets. An economic framework which incorporates the many interconnected factors relevant to small-scale farmers: ecology and environment, consumer culture, institutional organizational practices (at farmers' markets and otherwise), among others. This will include a shift in the cultural perceptions of food costs, because if we understand costs and benefits exclusively by monetary standards, value is only determined by a consumers' willingness to pay (Dolderer et al. 2021:10). This does not capture the complex values (and costs) of food beyond its monetary price.

I begin with an elementary explanation of neoclassical economics (as the dominant school of economic thought), its feminist critiques, and how neoclassical economics is complicated by neoliberalism. Drawing on my interviews data I will show how the assumptions of mainstream economics are at odds with what economically motivates farmers and their lived experiences. In the last section, I consider the way we tend to value farmers and food has become embedded into how farmers value themselves and what they do. In this and other ways despite political and other sentiments to the contrary, mainstream neoclassical economics becomes a ruling relation of farmers and farmers' markets. I will then explain why this is so problematic. Overall, I argue that emphasizing the economic importance of farmers' markets is not enough to support small-scale farmers or for farmers' markets to be economically and politically subversive, as they are (or were) intended to be.

#### 4.1 Neoclassical Economic Theory & Feminist Critique

Both public discourse and food studies literature refer to the economy in a taken-for-granted way. This is perhaps best exemplified by how “the economy” is referenced throughout the global Covid pandemic. Such discourse reifies the economy as something that exists outside of social forces when it is actually the accomplishment of individual and collective human activity. The social world is mystified when we reify social processes as inherent attributes of the human essence, which in turn makes social processes harder to change. This complicates the possibility of discerning which processes and elements of the economy are real or instead are products of how the world is conceptualized. Is there an economy independent of economists’ accounts of it? Neoclassical economics maintains that the economy is rooted in individualistic behaviour whereas Marxist economics analyzes reality in terms of collective actors or class interests. However, some sociologists see the economy differently. Sociologists understand the world as the outcomes of collective actions or people doing things together, although not always on the same page, and as suggested in Marxist thought, the economy has no autonomous existence. Mainstream economics holds that to work properly the economy is dependent on motivating people to act in ways they think are for their own benefit. Here I am arguing that the economy is a ruling relation at farmers’ markets – that is an institution and/or a cultural or intellectual discourse(s) “which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies” (Smith 1990:2). In order to make this case, I need to show how the economy is inscribed into and organizes our lives. This is a necessary segue to show how farmers’ markets lean into neoliberalized social and economic relations despite their alternative political commitments or different social and ecological sensibilities.

Although I am not an economist, here is my rudimentary analysis of the “economy” to understand farmers’ markets. As many economists see it, the economy involves producers, service providers, or others who have an item(s) to sell given that there are consumers who want to buy them. Both producer and consumer are considered to be economic actors, seeking to maximize utility – as economists would say. Many economic theories assume that economic actors operate in a closed system where price is the mechanism that enables the economy to self-regulate, that is the mechanism through which supply meets demand and demand regulates supply (Block 1990: 48; Lawson 2013; Dolderer et al. 2021). Dominant economic theories would have us think that the economy begins and ends with transactions between producer and consumer, though the economy is much more than the exchange of items for sale. For sociologists, the “economy” is better understood as a process, an ideology, an epistemology, an allegedly “logical” and “natural” organization of social relations. Although alternate theories of the economy do exist. Gibson-Graham (2013) recognize the economy beyond any monetary transactions between producer and consumer. Instead, the economy encompasses all human activities contributing to “social, material, and environmental well-being” (Gibson-Graham 2013:10). This helps us to better illustrate human’s economic activity throughout history (Ewen & Ewen 1992<sup>17</sup>), although not always in a capitalist sense, and illuminates how modern economic theories are narrowly rooted in scientific positivism (Lawson 2013; Dolderer et al. 2021:6).

Block (1990) argues that economic theorizing and explanation are inconsistent with how markets really operate. Block tells us that “actual economies represent an extremely complex

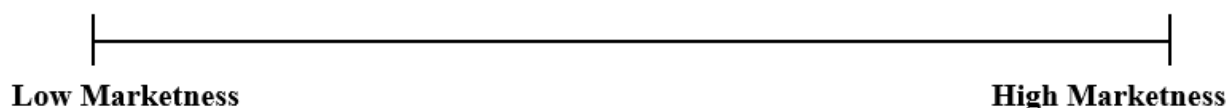
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<sup>17</sup> I acknowledge that I found Ewen & Ewen (1992) upon reading bell hooks (1992) chapter “Eating the other: Desire and Resistance” in her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*.

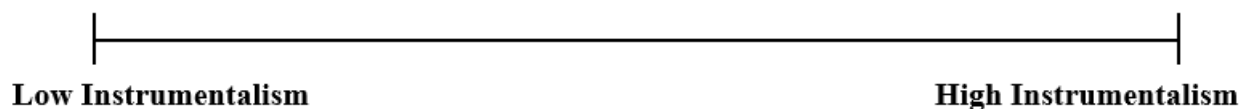
mix of micro-economic choices, social regulation, and state action” (1990:73). He suggests that markets are best understood along a “marketness” continuum (see Figure 1, pg. 36). By this Block means how markets are theorized may not be how they really operate. At high marketness, price considerations take precedence; whereas at low marketness, factors other than price take priority (Block 1990:51). Low marketness does not negate the importance of price, rather the importance price “compete[s] with other variables” (p. 51). Even so, marketness should not be taken alone as it is best understood alongside “the degree of instrumentalism of individual behavior” (p. 53). Hinrichs (2000) reflects on instrumentalism:

High instrumentalism occurs when actors prioritize economic goals and engage in opportunistic behavior to achieve them. In contrast, low instrumentalism reflects prioritization of such non-economic goals and concerns, as friendship, family or ethnic ties, morality or spirituality. Greater levels of instrumentalism tend to undermine the influence of responsive or reflective social ties (p. 297). (See Figure 2, page 36).

**Figure 1 – Marketness Continuum**



**Figure 2 – Instrumentalism Continuum**



Feminist critiques of neoclassical economics begin with how the individual is conceptualized. Under neoclassical economics, “the central character of economic analysis is the autonomous individual who trades with other individuals in order to maximize utility” (McMahon 1997:165). Utility is understood as the “satisfaction of an individual’s subjective desires” (England 1993:41) or “needs satisfaction” (Dolderer et al. 2021:7), which England

(1993) says assumes a “separative self” (p. 42). A separative self as economical rational agents suggests that economic actors generally do not act empathetically or with emotional connectedness in their market interactions – as distinct from their private or family lives (England 1993:42). As England points out, care and empathy exist in private spheres both in and outside of economic marketplaces (p.45). Neoclassical economists allege that interpersonal utility claims are implausible by assuming that marketplaces cannot involve empathy or emotional connectedness (England 1993). England (1993) says the move to deny interpersonal utility claims effectively shuts down any possibilities for egalitarian distribution. McMahon (1997) suggests that when utility is an *individualized* concept makes it challenging to “theorize either society or inequality” (p.165)<sup>18</sup>. Although neoclassical economics focuses on the individual, many economists simplify the range of human experience by assuming that human tastes are “fixed and exogenous” (unchanging and determined by external forces), as opposed to fluid and “endogenous” (changing and determined by internal forces) (England 1993:44). We all well know that human tastes are subjective, though there is a political undertone to theorizing the economy in this way. The assumptions that interpersonal utility claims are impossible and that human tastes are fixed and exogenous, work together to disguise the processes where gendered (England 1993:44), racial, dis/ability, and classist inequalities are accomplished or unaccounted for.

Continuing the critique of the individual, McMahon (1997) argues that the individual conceived in economic theory is masculinist, meaning that economic theories are androcentric (male-centered). Up until quite recently women had not been considered as full economic

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Carroll pointed out that utility theory was created as the alternative to Marx’s labour theory of value. The labour theory of value enables us to see the class exploitation facilitated under capitalism.

subjects, a by-product of androcentric centering (Ferber & Nelson 1993:4-5). If we value all objects and life by economic standards (which Smith [1989] suggests we do through increasing institutional organization) then androcentrism and economic value are inseparably entwined. It seems to me that this is immensely problematic at farmers' markets and other forms of alternative food networks because such alternatives focus on community building through caring for their farmers, consumers, and the environment. These alternatives centre the relational aspects of food and its production, making them in some sense "feminine" or more relational than economically rational and thus somehow less serious. Especially given that McMahon (2002) shows us that "women are overrepresented among very small farmers" (p.203), the point of androcentrism in economic thought is relevant to my overall analysis of farmers' markets. I suggest the popular and academic focus on prices at farmers' markets offers misleading understandings of those sites that functions ideologically to suppress the politics of alternative if not post-capitalist economies (Gibson-Graham 2014:S149).

However, it is not only mainstream economics at play here, but there are also complications brought about by neoliberalism. Where the individual takes precedence under the neoclassical model, the market takes precedence under neoliberalism. Brown (2016) suggests that the individual is sacrificed under neoliberalism<sup>19</sup>. Put more simply, the experience and success (or failure) of the individual is not relevant to the overall capitalistic success of economic markets. Although neoliberalism centers the market, it also responsabilizes<sup>20</sup> the individual as in

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<sup>19</sup> There are certainly many readings of neoliberalism with experts from varying fields understanding it in multiple ways. For my purpose, I find Brown's take on neoliberalism the most helpful.

<sup>20</sup> Brown explains responsabilization as "the moral burdening of the weak entity at the end of the pipeline with discerning and following the correct strategies of human capital appreciation. Responsibilization discursively and ethically converts the worker, student, poor person, parent, or consumer into one whose moral duty is to pursue savvy self-investment and entrepreneurial strategies of self-care. As it discursively denigrates dependency and practically negates

control of their own successes and failures (Brown 2016). By Brown's account, this is done through economizing<sup>21</sup> democratic practices in specifying "entrepreneurial conduct everywhere" (2016:3). Through economization, democracy loses its "political valence and gain[s] an economic one: freedom is reduced to entrepreneurial ruthlessness and equality gives way to ubiquitously competitive worlds of winners and losers" (p.3). This means that even if individuals follow prescribed good entrepreneurial practices, they may eventually fall victim to the whims of neoliberalism. Under neoliberalism, everything is done in the name of the market and the economy. For this reason, in modern times most political projects lose saliency if it does not contribute to market growth.

Neoliberalism's pervasive presence has transformed how economies work. Even more troubling, is that neoliberalism is indeterminate in its appearance around the globe (Brown 2015). This makes it a slippery concept to grasp. Despite this, Gibson-Graham (2008) warn that concepts like neoliberalism water down the saliency of how we understand the social world (p.618). For this reason, I am careful not to suggest that farmers' markets are inherently neoliberal, rather that farmers' markets can sometimes hold neoliberal ideologies in its organization. To suggest otherwise accomplishes what Gibson-Graham (2014) stand against. They share:

When the large issues to which small facts are made to speak are mostly those of the penetration of market forces or capitalist relations into all aspects of daily life, *a conception of possibility is constrained. Certainly noncapitalist economic imaginaries are curtailed...* By theorizing a diverse economy in which the dynamics of change are an open empirical question, not a structural imperative, I propose a framing that allows for a

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collective provisioning for existence, responsabilization solicits the individual as the only relevant and wholly accountable actor" (2016:9).

<sup>21</sup> Brown defines economization as "the conversion of non-economic domains, activities, and subjects into economic ones" (2016:3).

different imaginary in which economic possibility proliferates (Gibson-Graham 2014:S149).

Learning more about economic theory with its feminist critique helps me begin to understand why academic research and popular media tend to focus upon prices and the economic contribution of farmers' markets. To me, any assessments of farmers' markets through conventional economic categories of prices and economic contribution devalues and decentres the work of small-scale farmers, not least in creating possibilities for a more sovereign food system. This is not to say that there is not space for economic assessments, merely that evaluating based on economic criteria alone misses the deeper meanings behind farmers' markets. Food sovereignty<sup>22</sup> challenges neoclassical economics because the focus is not on conventional market returns. Instead, food sovereignty works towards more equitable relations around food and farming, both in interhuman and more-than-human relations. The transgressive potential of farmers' markets as a prefigurative post-capitalist economic site is both lost and suppressed when the discourse about them centres mainstream economics. Even farmers, as market participants themselves, are bound to this discourse when alternative political narratives are not available to them. There is a real danger that this political potential will be lost as neoliberal discourses continue to dominate farmers' markets organizations and local food movement politics. Others might suggest that farmers' markets are not an alternative to capitalist organization, but instead offer a space to distance themselves from parts of the industrial food system<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Discussed on page 9.

<sup>23</sup> Thank you Dr. Carroll for this insight.

Farmers' markets discourse hides more than its ideological links in food sovereignty. I argue that the economic focus reinforces harmful social misconceptions that food sold there is more expensive and classist. These misconceptions (often a little self-righteously) forget that the conventional global food system (Carolan 2011) is grounded upon economic exploitation, primarily of racialized communities (Wise 2019); the low food costs we see at supermarkets are only possible because of this exploitation. Research out of Waterloo, Ontario counters the assumption of higher food costs in local food systems by showing that most local produce prices are comparable to their conventional counterparts (Donaher & Lynes 2017). Donaher and Lynes (2017) show there is no evidence to support the idea that local foods are higher in cost than non-local or non-Ontario foods. With only a few local foods costing more, the majority of food costs were comparable (Donaher & Lynes 2017). They suggest that perceptions of higher food costs prevent local food systems from flourishing (Donaher & Lynes 2017). I follow this argument and supplement it by adding that perceptions of local food as expensive demoralizes and cuts at the hard work of local, small-scale farmers. Apart from this, because I grew up low-income, I can speak to feeling discouraged from shopping at venues like farmers' markets because of high food cost assumptions. I was pleasantly surprised by food prices when I finally gained the courage to visit a farmers' market. My experience in assuming high food costs partially illuminated this discourse issue in my research, which goes to say that discourse matters.

Apart from food costs, we have little if any data on what portion of farmers' markets economic contributions actually come from sales made by farmers' themselves. Currently the Canadian census does not collect data on food dollars spent at farmers' markets or at other alternative food sources, a major gap that food scholars and activists can strive to close in the future. Research conducted in 2004 and published in 2008 shows that customers at Ontario

farmers' markets spent an average of \$27.46 on groceries per visit (Smithers et al. 2004); when compared to Canada's average household food expenditure from 2003, this made up approximately 21% of customers' overall food dollars at that time (Survey of Household Spending 2003). As part of this, I also argue in conjunction with my chapter on consumer culture, that valuing farmers' markets by their economic contributions drives the organizational motive to bulk up farmers' markets with non-farm vendors. But perhaps most jarringly, the economic narrative is at odds with how farmers view their personal and political roles as farmers, as I show below.

#### **4.2 The Value of Food and Farming**

In this section, I consider the ideological bind facing farmers when selling at farmers' markets. Farmers' markets struggle to decouple neoclassical and neoliberal economics, as well as commodification, from the fundamentally different economic and non-economic practices used by the farmers who sell there.

When recruiting for my research, I was stunned to find that 53 farmers expressed such active enthusiasm to participate. In total, partly because I found I was pregnant shortly after the research started, I spoke only to 16 farmers, though I do not believe this led to any selection bias. My original research focus considered the issue of regulation, however the farmers interviewed did not express any significant or consistent regulatory troubles with their farmers' market(s). Dorothy Smith (1990) described how women once lacked the language to articulate their experiences. Much like the women Smith describes, farmers also did not have the language or discursive resources to adequately articulate theirs, yet they really wanted to talk to me. Aldeia and Alves (2019) explain that dominant language and discourse in the West has evolved in the

context of hegemonic meanings associated with capitalism. This means that everyday ways of talking about experiences could not readily describe what it means for the farmer, their work, or what they produce to be commodified. Nor could it talk of their alienation or their attempts to resist commodification. Let me partly explain why I think farmers are so anxious to talk to me yet found it hard to talk about their experiences.

Like most of us, farmers must find ways to pay their bills and do what we colloquially call “earning a living”. However, in my interviews, farmers felt they needed to justify this. I was curious as to why. I suggest that farmers have a sense of consumers’ assumption that small-scale farmers who produce “good” food exist outside of the contaminations of money, or at the most extreme, outside a capitalist society. Their justifications revealed the conflicts between cultural and economic logics informing how farmers value what they do and how others see them. This made “value” a key theme in my research. While reflecting upon the interviews, I recognized my own underlying assumption that farmers existed above the sordid business of making money and instead worked to “feed their communities”. In the abstract there is a necessary tension between making a living and feeding the community; however, I argue that this tension runs deep in practice at farmers’ markets. Brewster Kneen (1993) puts his finger on it when he says:

Of course farmers, along with everyone else, should make a decent living, but being paid fairly for the work one does is vastly different from defining what one does solely in terms of making money, or, in the case of farmers particularly, making a profit (Kneen 1993: 16).

Predominantly, farmers’ market literature focuses on the consumer, the price of local food especially relative to low-income households, the food for purchase, or the ideologies which inform them (eg. Holloway & Kneafsey 2000; Kirwan 2004, 2006; Alkon 2008; Wittman et al. 2012; Lucan et al. 2015; McNeill & Hale 2016). The omission of farmers’ experiences in

this research is ironic but not accidental (a few exceptions: Griffin & Frongillo 2003; Lyson et al. 1995; Beingessner & Fletcher 2020). The purposeful centering of consumers - both in the research, in popular narratives about farmers' markets, and by market managers - grants consumers the power to make or break a farmers' success.

The narrative goes: consumers must support their local farmer because small-scale farmers and local food risk extinction without their (virtuous and caring) support. Consumers wager their support to farmers upon the condition that their food is not priced too high in comparison to conventionally priced foods, otherwise farmers will not earn a living at all. This narrative, although partially true, does not grant farmers the capacity or power to remain faithful to their own food values. Farmers do not hold the power to reject "the consumer", which some farmers want to do when customers do not value their food beyond its exchange value (keeping in mind the consumer's terms of engagement). Nevertheless, farmers may occasionally refuse to sell to an individual consumer, but ultimately the farmer economically depends upon the consumer in a way that the consumer does not depend upon the farmer. By doing this, consumers unknowingly hold power over whether farmers can earn a living by choosing to buy from them or not, hinting (at least partially) at why farmers' market research has focused on the consumer. This is not to incriminate the consumer, but it begs us to consider what or who shapes consumer expectations and perspectives. Carl, Mark, and Marjorie give some insight into this problem:

Carl: It's tough cause you sometimes get someone coming to the market and they'll say "why is that so expensive?" and you turn around and say "why have you been paying so little?" That's the real question you should ask yourself, and that's, anyway, some people turn around and think about it, some people just think you're nuts.

Kora Liegh: Are people receptive to that? Does anybody engage with you on that?

Mark: It depends.

Marjorie: Definitely at some of the farmers' markets, some don't and some you look at them and say I don't even want to begin a conversation.

Mark: There's a lack of understanding too, because of the way food is presented as well. Some people go "oh your chicken is \$40" I'm like "Yeah cause [our chicken] weighs more than 500 grams, [unlike] your \$10 chicken at Walmart or whatever".

- Carl, Mark, and Marjorie, vegetable, poultry, and egg farmers.

For Carl, Mark, and Marjorie, many customers struggle to grasp the inherent differences between their farm compared to conventional farms. Part of consumers' disconnect happens when they base the value of food on the price or exchange value in supermarkets and Costco. Consumers want the most bang for their buck. Not to mention that supermarkets and Costco tend to have "loss leaders", where retailers set "retail prices for the selected items at or below retailers' respective marginal costs" (Matsushima & Miyaoka 2015:60) in order to get customers in the door (for example, Costco's rotisserie chicken [Hanbury 2018]). The other disconnect happens when consumers presume that exchange values or the price they pay is a return to the farmer; the consumer is indifferent to the alternative economic reality that the farmer bears the costs that are externalized in the industrial food system. In the industrial food system, these costs are carried by low-wage migrant workers, farmers and farm workers in the Global South, the environment, and/or animal welfare. Although at first glance it appears as such, the struggle for farmers is not necessarily with customers, but with the corporate food regime (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck 2011). The corporate food regime is characterized by:

unprecedented market power and profits of monopoly agrifood corporations... a 'supermarket revolution', liberalized global trade in food, increasingly concentrated land ownership... and [a] growing opposition from food movements worldwide (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck 2011:111).

Approaches taken up to resist this regime appear differently across time and space. These approaches reflect "important class, race, and systemic divides" (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck

2011:114) particular to the lived experiences of small-scale farmers and/or peasants<sup>24</sup> around the world. The Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*) in Brazil occupies and uses agroecological practices upon unused or poorly utilized lands, and often times land stolen from peasants by the government or large corporations for industrial agriculture (Bishops University Summer Field School 2014; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck 2011:134). In Argentina, after a wave of neoliberal policies were adopted in the 1990s, organizers of *ferias francas* worked together with government to “explicitly oppose neoliberalism” by making “farmers [sic] markets cheaper than supermarkets while also protecting [small-scale] producers” (Leslie 2017:730). Farmers have adapted in many ways to the pressures of the corporate food regime, with or without their government’s support, and in many cases against the forces of state-sanctioned violence (especially in Brazil).

For farmers on Vancouver Island, the hours farmers spend laboring is not reflected in their earnings, even when priced at minimum wage in BC. This means farmers do not “turn a profit”. Carl, Mark, and Marjorie calculated their hourly earnings to \$2.48 an hour and up to \$3.60 an hour the following year. Most of us know that people do not go into small-scale farming to get rich and often derive satisfaction from their farm beyond monetary compensation (Galt 2013), though this does not negate the fact that farmers require *fair* compensation (Kneen 1993). Some academics suggest the return to small-scale local farming is ‘self-exploitation’ (Galt 2013). This eludes the underlying political economic “wars” or at least tensions happening in the worlds of food and farming (Lang & Heasman 2015). Still, farmers find ways to make it work whether they are monetarily compensated fairly or not (though I am certainly not arguing in

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<sup>24</sup> Not all small-scale farmers refer to themselves as peasants. The peasant identity is less likely to be found on Vancouver Island as it is to be found in South America or parts of Asia.

favor of underpaying farmers). In part, because their participation in farmers' markets allows them to build community with other vendors who produce a variety of goods, some farmers trade goods with other vendors. Additionally, while most farmers build relationships with their customers, some farmers allow customers to exchange their professional services for food. In these instances, farmers step outside capitalist exchange relations, however somewhat mediated by their goods perceived exchange value.

However, the majority of transactions between farmer and consumer are monetary in nature, and one cannot simply blame consumers for being more focused on price than social justice or ecological values. We are all entwined in one way or another with the logics of capitalism, and many of us welcome opportunities for symbolic escape. This escape comes in the form of commodities believed to have desirable traits which the consumer can purchase (in this instance organic, local, and allegedly healthful or healthier foods). Yet ironically this can reinforce the reification of food through capitalist logic. Commodification is not simply the attachment of money value, but it is among other things, a process that absorbs the full meaning of something into the logic of capitalist relations. Some farmers attempt to escape this but are pulled back into this due to the nature of participating in a market. Farmers such as those I interviewed at least partly resist this reification, yet there is no doubt that these processes regulate the farmer. This puts a contradiction at the heart of what local small-scale farmers do, hence their need to "account" or justify themselves by reference to the need to make a living. Simply put, farmers know that many customers at farmers' markets want to buy food that is not commodified or is less commodified; while the food is still partially commodified by attaching an exchange value to it, this food retains the qualities often lost in the commodification process. Kneen (1993) argues that food's commodification separates food from its nutrition - its intrinsic

value - and makes food valuable exclusively through its exchange value. In a way, commodification signals the process which Zygmunt Bauman calls the “vanishing point of moral visibility” (1993 as cited in Carolan 2011:106). Carolan (2011) suggests that “Bauman is speaking about how our present economic system makes it possible to act with moral indifference; a system largely invisible to us erodes some of our moral grounding towards processes that make it possible” (p. 106). In other words, price often stands in the way of or limits moral groundings.

Food scholars such as Carolan (2011) argue that embodying relationships with food (those physical, visceral, emotional, social, and cultural connections) help us to understand and value food differently from its commodified value. Embodied food relationships enable a multiplicity of food values (Mol 2002 as cited in Dwiartama et al. 2016). Holding space for multiple food values allows us to acknowledge food as commodity while also “as a political instrument and cultural artefact” (Dwiartama et al. 2016:83). Food’s multiplicity is the site of the most intimate entanglements of humans with the rest of nature, in the co-production of the social world.

In a later publication, Carolan (2017) shows us how to better value the largely invisible processes behind food and farming. He argues that food can only be considered healthy when it affords the opportunity for all who are connected to it to live well – whether farmers, farm workers, and those working in processing plants and the more-than-human world (Carolan 2017). This is a little like Haraway’s (2016) concept of multispecies flourishing (where we understand the intersections and well-being of human and non-human worlds) as a test for what ever we do. Although other academics have narrowly hinted at the idea of mutual social and ecological well-being (Hinrichs 2003; Winter 2003; Sage 2003; Feagan et al. 2004), it must be

stated explicitly. The wealth of research that exists which examine farmers' markets by economic measures, lacks a social justice analysis (Connell et al. 2006; Guthman et al. 2006; Brown & Miller 2008; Toler et al. 2009; Guthman 2014; Hughes & Isengildina-Massa 2015; Lucan et al. 2015; Connolly & Klaiber 2019; Pilař et al. 2019). DeLind (2006) best explains why an economically centered approach is limited:

[w]hat are needed are ways of thinking and feeling about local food that cannot be easily appropriated and/or disappeared by the reductionist rationality of the marketplace and that can balance and reframe an economic orientation with more ecological and cultural understandings of people in place (p. 126 as cited in Carolan 2011:88).

In this sense, food from farmers' markets is the 'healthiest' you can buy – in the broad meaning of social and ecological health. This offers a much broader, nuanced, and inclusive concept of value.

Though value remains a slippery concept. Aldeia and Alves (2019) suggest that when something is valued primarily on how it benefits humans, it reinforces the Cartesian divide between humans and nature. When valuing "natural" things as a resource for humans, such as food or wood, it makes the more-than-human world subordinate (Aldeia & Alves 2019:7). Capitalistic epistemologies place humans at the centre of our knowing, while the more-than-human world is subject to human-imposed significances (social, economic, and ontological), meaning the more-than-human are subordinate to the survival of humans. In this frame of thought, humans live in "nature" not *as* "nature". They further explain that Western modern capitalism "is only capable of ascribing meaning to something by commodifying it" (Aldeia & Alves 2019:7). In this way, things are valuable *only* if they have been commodified through capitalism's economic lens. More significantly perhaps, commodification obscures human's dependency upon one another. This makes access to the means of sustaining life dependent on

the relations of commodification (eg. wage labour), inverting and misrepresenting humans' dependency on the more-than-human world. However, this is profoundly at odds with the philosophy and practices of small-scale ecological and organic farmers. Thus, the farmers' market exists as a site of political-economic and cultural struggles – carried out to a background of sunshine, cheerfulness, and entertainment.

Like the bus advertisement at the beginning of the chapter, the rhetoric around farmers' markets encourages the consumer to support our local farmer because of their locally grown food. This type of emphasis can be a useful marketing tactic for local farmers<sup>25</sup> to ensure food dollars get into their pockets. Yet it still largely misses the complex and contradictory meanings and values of farmers at farmers' markets and the ecological work practices they typically follow. This rhetoric says your local farmer is important insofar as the food they grow is valuable – a complex form of commodity fetishism and a profound mystification. Farmers' food is positioned as valuable because of its environmental benefits, through ecological growing practices and reduced mileage; and as healthier for the consumer, because food retains more nutritional value without traveling long distances and/or because it has not been grown in nutrient depleted soils (Davis 2004). However, this representation hides the deeper relations of production and consumption, social, historical, ecological, racialized, gendered and class-ed and as Indigenous nations point out, relationships with colonized land and the more-than-human for and to whom this land is home. Additionally, it does little to address the inherent inequalities in

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<sup>25</sup> It is worth mentioning that Wittman et al. (2012) shared that while participants felt campaigns like Buy BC were positive, they also found them to be “limited and insufficient in comparison to government support for export-oriented agriculture” (p. 44). Instead, participants found grassroots organizations and initiatives to have the biggest impact driving their local food systems by bringing awareness to “the links between food and health, the local economy, and the environment (p. 45).

the industrial food system, largely dependent on economically and bodily exploited migrant workers<sup>26</sup>, and environmental exploitation, which enables cheaply priced commodified food.

It is important to mention that neither the small-scale ecological farmer nor the consumer is in control of market forces which inform our economic relations to food. The consumer's perception of the cost of food is relative to what they normally expect to pay for food, typically in a supermarket. A consumer's budget limits their available food dollars and can be the deciding factor as to where they choose or can afford to purchase their food. This is not to say that this consumer does not care where their food comes from or who raised it, simply that they are entangled in a larger economic system where they have other economic obligations (hydro, rent, gas, etc.) and have limited funds to spend on food. On the other hand, farmers know which price best reflects the costs of their labour, supplies, knowledge, and time. Farmers too have the same sorts of economic obligations as consumers, including food. My interviews demonstrate that it was not only the actual regulation of farmers' markets which organized the lives of farmers, but instead the larger capitalistic ideology that informs how we know, what we do, and how we imagine alternatives. It is not enough to say that our lives are informed by capitalistic thinking. Most of us know this. To become part of making social change we need to see the processes of *how* we are collectively implicated in the reproduction of capitalistic thought, even when we look to subvert it. By witnessing the economy and economic discourses as a ruling relation of farmers and farmers' markets, we might begin to imagine what can be done differently in farmers' market organizations to reject, resist, or modify the traditional economy's influence.

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<sup>26</sup> For an example of the health exploitation of migrant farmworkers in the USA, see Holmes (2013); for a Canadian perspective, see Min Sook Lee's documentaries *El Contrato* (2003) and *Migrant Dreams* (2016).

### 4.3 The “Marketness” of Farmers’ Markets

In general, my interviews with farmers revealed that their economic interactions at farmers’ markets do not fit the conventions of economic thought. For this reason, I suggest it does not make sense for farmers’ markets to be framed by conventional economic measurements, whether it be the price of the food or the economic impact. Yes, as already established, farmers have economic motivations. They have bills to pay, costs to cover, a living to make. However, the farmers I spoke with are not engaged in the same sort of wealth accumulation or profit maximizing suggested in neoclassical economics. Many price foods below “what the market can bear” because they think in terms of feeding their communities, but also because they are in competition with supermarket pricing and industrial food. What farmers told me is at odds with the neoclassical economic model (Kirwan 2004, Table 1). They were not out to maximize profitability nor to increase market shares, as neoclassical economics often suggests. At least half (50%) of the farmers voiced motivations to create a better food system, growing what they believe qualifies as “good” food for their community; making enough money to survive is a means to an end to enable farmers to continue this community work. DeLind (2002) tells us that small-scale farmers often face similar contradictions as conventional farmers do, and because of this, small-scale farmers get pulled back into measuring success by “economic expansion” (p.219) often focused on “creating economic infrastructure” (p.222). In this section I argue that narrowly appraising farmers’ markets by economic measures weakens their political potentials and glosses over their most salient and subversive features.

Thirty one percent (31%) of the farmers in my study told me they try to keep their food priced as affordably as they can economically allow, to the point of earning less than minimum wages themselves by personally subsidizing the food they sell. In other literature this is often

cited as being “economically viable for farmers and consumers” (Feagan et al. 2004:238).

Academics sometimes classify small-scale farmers’ political and ethical commitments as self-exploitation (Galt 2013). As mentioned above, consumers tend to understand food pricing based on supermarket food prices. Because supermarket prices inform, but do not determine, farmers’ market pricing, they are complexly related. The price of supermarket food informs what a small-scale, ecological farmer might reasonably ask a customer to pay for their food – because these farmers would not earn a living at all if they priced their food for the real production costs of food they grow (Leslie 2017). As I mention above (pg. 45), supermarket food prices have externalized much of the real cost of food onto low-wage migrant workers, farmers and farm workers in the Global South, the environment, and/or animal welfare. It pulls local farmers into an unfair false competition. Recalling Mark’s quote above (p. 44), he speaks to the tensions in farmers’ awareness of the market being stacked against them:

It’s tough cause you sometimes get someone coming to the market and they’ll say “why is that so expensive?” and you turn around and say “why have you been paying so little?” That’s the real question you should ask yourself, and that’s, anyway, some people turn around and think about it, some people just think you’re nuts.

- Mark, vegetable, poultry, and egg farmer (with Carl and Marjorie).

Mark’s comment speaks to farmers’ frustration at customers’ ignorance of or indifference to the realities of global food prices. Some farmers find customers’ demands for “fairer” prices at farmers’ markets annoying. He rhetorically asks why customers have not been paying the real cost of food. Mark knows that a customers’ understanding of food pricing comes from conventional food, meaning that to customers, his food may appear inflated by virtue. It is nonetheless distressing. Many farmers will let such comments go and just share “can you believe it” stories about customers among themselves. Mark, Marjorie, and Carl, however, take customer

inquiries into the cost of their food seriously in order to debunk popular assumptions about food costs.

We aren't ignorant about our pricing, we don't price it too low that we're unable to pay our bills, well I mean it's always a challenge farming anyway, but we don't price it so high that we don't sell stuff either.

- Mark, vegetable, poultry, and egg farmer (with Carl and Marjorie).

Mark tells us that they must price their food so that they are able to pay their bills.

Although these farmers are often not “capitalizing” on the foods they raise, and this goes against many business models. Mark presents an interesting challenge to some academic literature which suggest that farmers’ markets reproduce neoliberal mentalities and are exclusively for those of higher economic status (Guthman 2008). Instead, farmers’ markets are better understood as a site where relationships to food and farmers, both economic and otherwise – are closer to the real costs of food production than supermarket prices. In this sense, it is not small-scale farmers or farmers’ market managers who are reproducing neoliberal mentalities, it is the contemporary industrial agri-food system or what Carolan calls global food itself which is founded upon systematic exploitation of both “nature” and humans. The question, I would suggest, should not be “why are farmers at farmers’ markets charging so much?” but instead “why are most farmers and farm workers not being paid fairly for the work they do?”. My question to academics is within what frame of reference do you conceptualize social justice? I think we need a transnational one that includes many different kinds of farmers, farm and migrant workers, legal and undocumented. Although my focus here is on how the organization of farmers’ markets shapes farmers’ experience, the shift to local food and farmers’ markets around Vancouver Island as well as elsewhere cannot be fully understood outside a transnational context (Fendrychová & Jehlička 2018).

Not only are farmers hindered from paying themselves a fair wage, but many farmers also depend upon volunteer labour. Only one farmer in my interviews made use of the volunteer program WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), where individuals interested in learning hands on skills in farming work for room, board, and food in exchange for their labour. In a similar vein, across British Columbia and elsewhere, there exist farm apprenticeship programs (for example, Stewards of Irreplaceable Lands [SOIL]), where volunteers exchange labour for instruction, knowledge sharing, and farm experience. One farmer indicated the use of an apprenticeship program to acquire help on her farm. These apprenticeships often allow individuals interested in farming careers to obtain paid farm positions in the future. Importantly, small-scale farmers cannot afford to hire unskilled farm workers for pay (Weiler et al. 2016). Four farmers in my study (including a farming family) hired part-time or full-time seasonal farm workers during the high season. None of the farmers reported hiring migrant farm workers during our interviews. However, the farmers who did not hire labour were not exempt from receiving help. At least five farmers in my interviews spoke of having friends and family assist on the farm during labour intense times, typically for harvesting time-sensitive crops. In these instances, farmers and their unpaid workers are said to engage in the “moral economy”, that is “the production and exchange of goods and services on the basis of non-capitalist cultural norms of human goodness, fairness and economic justice” (Weiler et al. 2016:1143). Weiler et al. (2016) critique the precarity of this sort of farm work upon the premise of “socially just alternatives to dominant modes of agriculture” (p.1145).

I realize part of my work here is undoing my naivety for having accepted mainstream and academic stories about farmers’ markets. Even if farmers price their food higher, this does not necessarily lend to higher returns. In fact, Paul tells us that even if there are customers willing to

pay high prices, it does not make his farm business more lucrative. This further rejects the overly simplistic characterization of neoliberalized farmers' markets, at least in British Columbia. Paul prices his products to be relatively accessible to most customers; with this strategy, Paul sells more of his product. Should Paul price his products at a higher cost, he says his product appeals to less customers and subsequently earns less. In order to survive, farmers must set aside the real costs of production by shaping their prices with reference to supermarket pricing.

It is helpful to recognize a kind of interdependent relationship between small-scale farmers and their customers. On the one hand, farmers are dependent on there being enough customers to make purchases so farmers can survive economically. On the other hand, customers are dependent on farmers who grow in ecologically sensible ways for the collective environmental benefit of farmers, customers, and non-customers alike, alongside the more-than-human world. Customers often hold certain unstated conditions before readily "supporting" their small-scale local farmers (such as wanting "reasonably" priced foods or requiring the farm to be organically certified). However, I suggest that customers often forget that it is small-scale farmers who make access to their food preferences possible. Farmers are not only dependent upon customers, but, less recognized is that customers depend upon farmers too. Local, ecologically grown, and potentially organic food would not exist without farmers actively deciding to farm in this way<sup>27</sup>, and farmers choose to farm this way in spite of economic difficulties it may place on their life. Many farmers will tell you that their farm employees earn more than they (the farmers) do<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> However, this is in tension with how corporate capital has begun coopting these practices too.

<sup>28</sup> Informal information from fellow sociology student ex farm worker.

Even though these farmers already make so little relative to the labour, time, and resources exerted for their business, they still talked about the importance of keeping farmers' markets, or at least their own farm business, economically accessible to low-income people. This negates assumptions that farmers' markets appeal to those with disposable income. Marjorie told me about how she and other farmers go above and beyond for low-income populations, seniors, or new moms, who benefit from the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program. Individual farmers' markets partner with one or more community organizations for funding. The community organization identifies program participants. The community organization's funding provides a fixed number of participants with a weekly market coupon valued at \$21<sup>29</sup>. Marjorie explains:

Every time we get a coupon customer, we really try to make the effort to go above and beyond because we realize they're coming from either disadvantaged backgrounds or they're seniors or new moms, so to really make them feel comfortable and offer all that we can to them.

- Marjorie, vegetable, poultry, and egg farmer (with Carl and Mark).

The coupon program ensures that farmers still get paid when food is purchased with coupons. However, the choice to give more than the dollar value of the coupons is an informal, discreet, and often widespread practice at some markets. Research at a California farmers' market documents a similar practice (Saitone & McLaughlin 2018). Farmers' market organizations are profoundly shaped by the neoliberalized context in which they are run, but there is more going on.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/coupon-program/how-it-works/>

Small-scale farmers act differently than typical economic actors. The relationship among small scale farmers at markets is more often one of cooperation than competition. Eight (50%) of the farmers said they help each other out through knowledge and resource sharing and directing customers to another farmers' stall if they have sold out of something or if they do not offer what the customer is looking for. Clarence avoided one farmers' market all together for the sake of farmer fellowship. He explains:

Clarence: A friend of ours, a guy from over here in [town name] went into [farmers' market], doing the same thing we're doing, so we just stayed out of [farmers' market] for the last 20 years. He's out of business as of last year, he shut down at the end of the year, so that gave us the opportunity to jump in. Yeah.

Kora Liegh: So you decided not to go to that farmers market because...?

Clarence: Because we were both doing the same things and we have both helped each other out over the years... Yeah, when he's got problem and when we've had problems I'll go over and help him and sometimes he'd come over and help me or whatever, and we both had good ideas and helped each other out. So yeah it, and he was only doing the one market whereas we had already gotten involved in 1 or 2 or 3 you know as we progressed and we were doing okay with the wholesaling and markets on the side. He had a store at his greenhouse plus he had the [farmers' market], which basically supported him.

Kora Liegh: So you didn't want to take away any of his business at his markets?

Clarence: No. Well we were okay with what we were doing, if I would have had to plant, to plant more plants to get involved in the [farmers' market], and to me it didn't make sense to go into competition with him and do more work to do it

Kora Liegh: Yeah

Clarence: So you know you gotta, and it probably would have ruined our friendship too, so... Yeah and the cost wasn't worth it. Yeah, I would rather have a friend that compete with somebody.

- Clarence, vegetable farmer.

Here, Clarence tells us that small-scale farmers often value cooperation over competition.

Tunnicliffe (2011) documents similar instances of farmer cohesion and cooperation.

Given Block's (1990) scale of marketness (discussed on pages 35-36) and the experiences of farmers, I suggest that farmers at BC farmers' markets are of low marketness. Farmers showed that while the prices they charge for their food matters, their business are heavily informed by non-price considerations. Some of these non-price considerations are what Hinrichs (2000) refer to as social embeddedness, "the sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust" (Hinrichs 2000:296). She suggests that social embeddedness is a characteristic of direct agricultural markets, however social embeddedness does not "preclude instrumental behaviors or the relevance of price" (Hinrichs 2000: 296). Farmers find themselves in the contradictions between social embeddedness and needing to make a living. The constant pull for farmers to think economically shows how the economy acts as a ruling relation in the organization of their lives. How the farmers I interviewed price and grow food is potentially politically subversive because they challenge the prevailing assumption that industrial agriculture and the agribusiness model is the only "affordable" and productive way to feed the world. Whether this politically transgressive potential is realized however is a question for the future. I argue that farmers' markets could easily become almost completely neoliberalized, especially as the older farmers who were politically and ecologically motivated are replaced by new, younger, more entrepreneurial farmers (McMahon 2014) who see the turn to the local as a potentially lucrative business opportunity with the added bonus of celebratory identities on social media (Goodman 2010).

The promise of neoliberal governance entices farmers, though not explicitly as neoliberalism. Brown (2016) tells us that best business practices form a part of neoliberal governance which "discursively replace differential positions within orders of power and suppress deliberations about contesting visions of the good" (p.4). Under the guise of good

intentions, many farmers' market organizations take it upon themselves to present such best practices to their participants for their "individual" success. For example, the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) published their "*Marketing Toolkit: Best Business Practices in Marketing for Farmers' Market Farmers*" in 2017. This shows that farmers' market organizations are not immune to neoliberal logic, at least not without a conscious awareness of its presence. As neoliberalism acts as a conductor of capitalism and profit accumulation, this appears not to be in line with the kind of transformative change or visions of good in attempt at farmers' markets. As a result of this best practice alignment, we see farmers' market organizations shifting their focus from maintaining farmer priority through regulating and jurying its vendors<sup>30</sup> (in the pursuit of food sovereignty), to the pursuit of profit-gains by deregulating farmer presence, even if this means losing focus of farmers and food sovereignty as its mandate. The act of deregulating farmer presence at farmers' markets to allow relatively unfettered market entry of other vendors to generate more profits, very much resembles neoliberal ideology.

Insights from ecofeminism can help us to see how farmers' markets *do* thrive beyond the import of neoclassical and/or neoliberal economics. Despite the dominance of economic organization, farmers' markets (and farmers more specifically) help to foster ecological sensibilities and community building (Gillespie et al. 2007; Wittman et al. 2012; Robinson & Farmer 2017; Leslie 2017). Farmers' markets do this by reminding us that the food we consume makes us interdependent on each other and the more-than-human world. Indeed, farmers and customers alike are the very "embodied, sensual subject intimately connected to others and

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<sup>30</sup> Discussed in depth in chapter five.

nature in time and space” (McMahon 1997:164) emphasized in ecofeminist thought. In a tongue-in-cheek sort of way, farmers’ markets and other direct agricultural markets could be said to be both in and also *beyond* economic. Direct agricultural markets are a threat to be dampened by industrial agriculture and economic models because they demonstrate that there is no human individualism, we all depend upon each other. It re-embeds social and ecological relations that are otherwise blurred or rendered invisible via conventional agriculture.

#### **4.4 Concluding Thoughts**

My research on farmers’ markets leads me to conclude that we need a new economic framework to use in thinking about farmers’ markets. Perhaps this begins by turning to the many substantial works of Gibson-Graham to grasp a better understanding of economies beyond market transactions. While I can certainly not downplay the importance of economic viability to the longevity of small-scale farmers, only focusing on mainstream economics undercuts the larger, salient, and most subversive political acts that farmers’ markets have, and sometimes still do, foster.

## **Chapter Five: How Consumer Culture Affects Small-Scale Farmers**

Two goals brought me to Vancouver Island: my master's degree and my growing interest in food studies. I wanted to live somewhere where I could learn about what creates an exuberant local food movement, and Vancouver Island fit the bill. I will freely admit that I held a naïve and idealistic image of the local food movement before I arrived; my fieldwork tested this and, instead, illuminated the many challenges facing small-scale farmers. In my naivety, I expected to find farmers' markets burgeoning with local foods and crowded with farmers – I felt shocked when I found that they did not. Most farmers' markets had a smattering of farmers who were vastly outnumbered by crafters and other non-farm vendors. Two extremes presented themselves. Many markets had no more than a few farmers among a sea of other vendors, while other markets were exclusively for farmers. Both extremes hinted at a predicament facing farmers' markets, which forms the subject matter of this chapter.

Some assumptions I had about farmers' markets hold true, such as the vibrant sense of community collectively built by bringing together farmers, food trucks, crafters, live entertainment, and of course, customers. However, the outward friendly nature of the market often hides tensions between vendors. This tension is better understood as consumer culture. Specifically, farmers tell me that market managers struggle to maintain a balanced relationship between farmers, crafters, and other vendors. I quickly learned that the farmers' market meant more than just the local food movement. It also housed anything produced locally, sometimes framed as supporting the local and sometimes framed as a protection against the threats of global capitalism. Market managers must navigate keeping local alive alongside the competing and sometimes antagonistic needs of fundamentally different kinds of vendors. Many small-scale ecological farmers depend upon farmers' markets first, to keep their own businesses afloat, and

second, to preserve and defend small-scale farming. The latter tends to lose focus in the pursuit of the former. For these reasons, farmers' needs differ greatly from those of the non-farm vendors. The catch is, my research found a "both/and" situation (Galt 2013:347), whereby farmers are both dependent upon and restricted by the presence of non-farm vendors at farmers' markets. It seems that market managers struggle in their commitment to organize an alternative marketplace against the pull of neoliberal economics.

Small-scale farmers typically build a dedicated customer base at farmers' markets. Farmers' markets offer an entry point to the alternative food economy for new and first-generation small-scale farmers. The farmers I interviewed unanimously announced that farmers' markets enabled them to build their farm business, as is documented elsewhere (Griffin & Frongillo 2003; Feagan et al. 2004). Farmers' markets help farmers meet their customers, especially their "regulars". Having access to customers determines whether small-scale farmers can sell what they grow and/or raise. Such farmers typically rely on direct marketing, unlike what are called "commodity producers". A farm remains a farm without customers, but a farmer requires customers to keep the farm economically viable. Although alternate means to move food from farm to customer do exist, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), U-Pick operations, or farm-gate sales (when customers make purchases at the farm's gate), farmers still must establish a customer base before they can successfully branch out and tap into other markets. Therefore, the farmers' market is typically the essential stepping-stone to progress into other alternatives if they so choose. Of course, farmers may engage in all, some, or none of these alternatives as a part of their farm business, but only after becoming established at their (relatively) local farmers' market first.

Still, farmers' markets cannot guarantee the presence of shoppers. In fact, markets often require several years, if not decades, to establish themselves as a community keystone and be well attended. Community keystones are said to enable economic growth for their participants (Davies et al. 2001 as cited in Schupp 2017). Thus, farmers expect market managers to attract enough customers to ensure their economic sustenance. The challenge of keeping markets economically viable is not endemic to Vancouver Island. For example, a market manager in the Eastside of Lansing, Michigan shared that their market's economic viability takes precedence over the community's needs, including the farmers' (DeLind 2011:281). Kirwan (2004) shows that market managers maintain economic viability by providing both variety and consistent availability of produce (p. 407). With economic precedence (DeLind 2011), practicality and convenience (Kirwan 2004) in mind, market managers must discover the wants and needs of current and potential shoppers. To include all potential customers, market managers look beyond those committed to purchasing locally grown and ecologically produced food. To attract more shoppers, market managers enlist and support other non-farm, local primary and secondary producers (non-farm vendors). "Good" farmers' markets are believed to house many types of local producers.

In my interviews, farmers recognized the importance of crafters and other vendors to draw and attract customers to the market, especially customers who would have not come otherwise. This shows that non-farm vendors have a place at farmers' markets because, aside from keeping these vendors in business, they support farmers' financial sustainability. Then where does the problem lie, especially if farmers recognize and want crafters to sell there, too? Let me dig in.

## 5.1 The Organization of Farmers' Markets

### 5.1.1 Market Managers

Market managers, market organizers, or the executive director, coordinate the visions held by the board of directors (or board of governance), vendors, and market customers for how the farmers' market operates (Manager Training Manual 2010:3). Managers can either be paid full-time or part-time positions or a volunteer position. I attended one relatively new and significantly smaller farmers' market which was ran and organized by a volunteer manager, the other markets had paid managers. Managers are also responsible for upholding and disseminating information from other governing bodies, such as the Vancouver Island Health Authority, Ministry of Health, regional government bylaws, etc. (Manager Training Manual 2010:3).

Market managers wear many hats. The Manager Training Manual (2010:3) outlines multiple duties that managers may find themselves responsible for. Managers are responsible for coordination activities, including market set up and tear down and deciding vendor stall assignments; coordinate volunteers; work directly with Board of Directors. Financial responsibilities include collecting stall fees; tracking prices at supermarkets and other farmers' markets to guide vendor pricing. Managers should mediate market public relations, which includes developing repertoire with vendors; guide and educate vendors; request feedback from vendors; recruit new vendors; ensure good customer relations; respond to complaints and emergencies; resolve disputes; managing market information booth. Marketing responsibilities include special events and festivals; promote the market and any market events; develop and maintain market image; book performers and entertainers; maintain order and cleanliness. Managers are typically responsible for administrative duties such as maintaining a daily market

log; monitor and maintain quality control; assess market development; monitor goals and strategies; collect market data; recommend improvements to management systems. And lastly, managers enforce and remind vendors of regulations and bylaws.

Managers are asked to consider the ways their market can “enrich the community” (Manager Training Manual 2010:7). The potential enrichments listed include supporting local agriculture; providing fresh and locally grown produce; incubate new small-business enterprises; local economic development; public education about the importance of buying local; job development; facilitate food security; a venue for social and community gathering; provide quality products and selection; tourist attraction; community health resource (Manager Training Manual 2010:7). At the end of this section within the Manager Training Manual they share “We think of a Farmers’ Market as a 3-legged stool. One leg being the farmer, one the consumer, and the other is the community, and all three legs are in equal proportions and balanced” (Connell et al. 2006 as cited in Manager Training Manual 2010:8), however there is little mention of farmers in these goals. The emphasis remains on local food and other market elements, and less so on local farmers.

Perhaps the lack of emphasis on farmers in market organizations leads to how Donald felt towards his market manager. Donald expressed that his primary market was managed poorly, despite being perceived as a successful market by others. He shared, “anything that has been done at the market in the last year could be done on a volunteer basis just as easily as having a paid staff, I mean there’s nothing revolutionary happening there in terms of farm market management”. The Manager Training Manual (2010) speaks to this by stating that “an employee can bring... increased productivity, job longevity, and a professional commitment that volunteers may not be able to sustain” (p. 3). As I described above, managers wear many hats and assume a

considerable amount of responsibility in managing a market, which may otherwise be cumbersome and unsustainable on a volunteer basis. However, Donald expressed that he felt that farmers' roles are underplayed and given less consideration by market managers in farmers' market organizations than farmers should have.

### *5.1.2 Board of Directors*

A market's board of directors is typically made up of vendors who have volunteered themselves for election to the board, and in many cases are acclaimed. Ideally, the board of directors will have representation of farm-vendors and non-farm vendors. However, as some farmers pointed out, farmers often work 80+ hours a week which limits their availability and resources to volunteer themselves as board members. The board of directors work together with the market manager to create and ensure their vision and goals for their market. The board may also work with the market manager to decide financial and accounting systems, determine market policies, design the market layout, organize special events, develop communications and promotions, and engage in vendor recruitment (Manager Training Manual 2010:5). The board must also be aware of the market's financial and governance responsibilities (Manager Training Manual 2010:6).

### *5.1.3 Vendors*

Most farmers' markets have multiple vendor types. The most obvious vendors are farm-vendors, those who grow and raise their own produce, fruits, eggs, honey, poultry, and meats, otherwise known as farmers or primary producers. The farms must be local to Vancouver Island and/or the Gulf Islands, and in most cases within reasonable proximity to the market's location.

Other food vendors include prepared foods, such as baked goods, food trucks, preserves, prepared and sold by vendors local to Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. Other vendors include crafters, artisans, and mobile services (such as knife sharpening), who sell goods made themselves on Vancouver Island or the Gulf Islands. There is an emphasis on using resources from British Columbia. In lieu of British Columbian resources, the labor should have taken place locally.

#### *5.1.4 Stall Allocation and Payment*

Farmers' markets typically have full-time and drop-in vendor stalls. Full-time vendors are expected at and are guaranteed a stall for all market days. They generally pay a lump sum for their stall at the season's start. Markets which run year-round may have different stall prices for high season (May/June until September/October) and low season (September/October until April/May). Full-time vendors accumulate seniority points for each season and market day attended. Seniority points prioritize long-time vendors which guarantees a market stall for the season and to allocate desirable stall locations. Some markets have farmer-priority, where farm vendors are given priority over non-farm vendors, regardless of a vendor's seniority points. Should a full-time vendor be unavailable to attend on a specific day, they must report their absence to the market manager. The market manager can then make the full-time vendor's stall available to a drop-in vendor.

Drop-in vendors are organized by their accumulated seniority points. Vendors with seniority have priority over newer vendors. Seniority is earned and calculated by each market day and season attended. Drop-in vendors pay per each market day they attend. Some markets may have farmer-priority, where drop-in farm vendors are given priority over non-farm drop-in

vendors. This is important for new farmers. It can be difficult to build a reliable customer base without a permanent stall location. Drop-in vendor positions are often stepping-stones towards full-time vendor positions at established markets.

## **5.2 From the Roots: Farmers' Experiences**

Farmers selling at seven of the sixteen markets in my study shared that they experience tensions with non-farm vendors. Although hinted at in other farmers' market research (Lyson et al. 1995; Griffin & Frongillo 2003), the tensions between farmers and non-farm vendors have not been explored in depth. Most of these are concealed beneath the surface and are not interpersonal in origin. Instead, they are inherent in the nature of the market. As markets scale up and out (Johnston & Baker 2005), farmers grapple with the growing pains that follow. Once well-established and well-attended, the demand for space to sell at markets increases, leading to a tipping point where they meet or exceed capacity. At this point, market managers are tasked with fine-tuning the balance between jurying farm and non-farm vendors, as well as meeting consumer demands and expectations. All vendors covet stalls at well-attended markets and, as such, market managers needed to develop systems to balance their increased interest.

One way of managing the demand for market space involves a points system for vendors with seniority. This system does not necessarily discern between farm or non-farm vendors. Other markets claim to prioritize farm vendors, however, without having access to their by-laws and policies, I can only account for this by hearsay<sup>31</sup>. In instances where farmers have priority,

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<sup>31</sup> Three of the farmers said they would ask their market's Board of Directors or market manager if I could have a copy of their markets' bylaws, unfortunately none of them responded when I followed up about the status of accessing the document. I, then, requested copies of market bylaws from the market managers directly, however those requests went unanswered.

the priority status trumps seniority points. Ultimately, it becomes a matter of who has access and is entitled to market space.

Some markets at spatial capacity implemented a farmer-cap, limiting the total number of farm vendors. Existing and aspiring small-scale farmers felt the cap to be unfair. Especially because, as previously established, new small-scale farmers require farmers' markets to start their farm business. From this perspective, the farmer-cap appears prohibitive to the ideological nature of farmers' markets: to support small-scale farmers.

The farmer-cap helped to illustrate where the complex relationship between farm and non-farm vendors originated. It is a complex relationship because farm vendors and non-farm vendors both depend upon each other, yet they compete with one another for market space. The nature of the competition between farm and non-farm vendors differs slightly from traditional economic competition, largely because they are not competing to sell the same kind of commodity. Rather, vendors are competing for access to limited market space<sup>32</sup>. Even though there are fundamental differences between what farm and non-farm vendors sell, by mainstream economic standards what they sell is reduced to commodities. Although farmers briefly talked about competition between themselves, they did not see this competition as unwelcoming, concerning, or troublesome. This tells us that farmers do not fear competition per se, because they generally see other farmers' presence in a positive light. However, it does speak to the tensions inherent in the very nature of farmers' markets. That is, the political goal of many small-scale farmers and the local food movement to de-commodify food. This is one of the unspoken, and hard to articulate contradictions at the heart of farmers' markets.

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<sup>32</sup> And to some extent, purchaser dollars available on any market morning. Some established vendors will tell you that if there are extra or non-regular vendors at a market on a long weekend, established vendors suffer.

When I asked Carl, Marjorie, and Mark what they would like to see at farmers' markets, Carl responded, "I'd like to see more farmers at farmers' markets". Carl's sentiment matched my fieldnotes: why were there not more farmers? Some may interpret the presence of more farmers as creating more competition, however the farmers I interviewed generally reported cooperation and comradery between farmers, and more importantly, as a sign of small-scale farming's success. This directed me to the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) Membership Policy, which designates venues as farmers' markets, as opposed to local markets. I was inclined to believe that the membership policy would highlight how the institution responsible for farmers' markets governance views the role of farmers.

The ideologies behind farmers' markets seem to be at odds with actual practice. This is shown in part by the lack of centrality of farmers throughout the BCAFM policy. The *raison d'être* of farmers' markets is to first protect, at least partially, local farmers and *then* other local commodities from the forces of global capitalism. Gillespie et al. (2007) suggest that farmers' markets are keystones towards creating more localized food systems by "support[ing] seemingly separate social and economic building blocks: the local resource bases and skills of producers, the needs and preferences of local households, and the development goals of communities" (p. 66). Gillespie et al. (2007) further state that "some farmers' markets play a central role in providing local residents with safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritious food at the same time that they stimulate new and stronger local food and farming enterprises" (p. 80). Perhaps not explicitly stated as food sovereignty, on comparison to food sovereignty's definition (see page 9), it appears to me that farmers' market functions entail key aspects of this ideology. This is done through emphasizing the available skills and resources of farmers, farmers preferences (first and foremost) and consumer preferences, and by considering the needs of their specific

locality in provisioning local food grown with ecological and sustainable methods. The farmers interviewed did not explicitly discuss food sovereignty – they did however talk about the want to produce good, healthy, regionally appropriate food for their community, enjoy having control over how and what they grow, and building a sense of community specific to place. Importantly in the current context, farmers’ markets are designed to keep small-scale farmers central and protected within farmers’ market organizations themselves, as is done in Argentinian farmers’ markets (Leslie 2017). It also seems to me that the BCAFM might do well to centre the support for local food sovereignty in its mandate and roll back the conflation of food and farm products. Farmers do produce food, but not all food can be taken as a farm product that supports local agriculture, which is a main goal and *raison d’être* of farmers markets. The tensions I cover below might well be smoothed out if this mandate were clearly stated and upheld.

The membership policy defines the prevailing “make it, bake it, grow it” (MBG) philosophy that most markets adopt. To “grow” includes “farm products that are grown or produced on BC land,” “nursery products,” “cut flowers and herbs that were grown by the vendor,”; “make” includes “processed/prepared foods,” “artisanal and craft products... these may include raw component products that were purchased or originated on one’s farm,” “services,” and that “priority should be given to makers that source ingredients and components of BC origin; “bake” means “products that are baked from scratch” and again should prioritize bakers who use ingredients of BC origin (BCAFM Membership Policy: 2-3). Under the MBG policy, the BCAFM requires at least 51% of farmers’ market vendors to be made up of primary producers (farmers), processed/prepared food, and ready to eat food “on a typical market day” (BCAFM Membership Policy: 2). The policy did not, however, specify a minimum percentage of farmers, indicating that while farmers’ markets keep foodstuffs central, the kind of food or how

it is produced is not. It was brought to my attention that the BCAFM membership policy had previously stated that markets must be made up of 51% farmers, instead of what is now 51% food<sup>33</sup>. Without a focus on farmers and farming, the philosophy stands in direct contravention of the local food movements' goals regarding farmers' markets.

Some farmers favoured the MBG policy. Marjorie shared that she “really, really appreciate[s] pretty much every market we attend is make it, bake it, grow it... it keeps the quality high... it keeps it local”. For Marjorie, this philosophy maintains the quality of farmers' market offerings while at the same time keeping them local. Although highly subjective, in Marjorie's case, quality means a particular jurying and selection of local vendors for her farmers' market to maintain a socially agreed upon standard. Quality in this sense differentiates between commodities bought from anywhere to a locally crafted commodity only available through local means. Both “quality” and “local” were key codes in my data, appearing 17 and 29 times, respectively. “Quality” and “local” were used synonymously or were alluded to as mutually accepted. These terms rarely referred to taste and freshness, as is often the case in consumer-based literature on farmers' markets, but rather signified the quality and local production of commodities in general. Quality and local, then, embody the social relations implicit in a commodity by re-centering the laboring individual responsible for producing it and tying it to geographic space.

“Quality” and “local” are not new to alternative food systems discourse, having been extensively theorized, debated, and even glorified for at least three decades. North American and European circles conceptualize these terms quite differently. Localism in North America centers re-spatializing food for its perceived environmental and social/community benefits (Feagan

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<sup>33</sup> Personal correspondence.

2007). Further, localism in North America is positioned as a caring act which embodies resistance against an uncaring hegemonic capitalism (DuPuis & Goodman 2005); however, the extent of localism's "care" is up for debate as it inherently involves exclusion towards "particular people, places, and ways of life" (DuPuis & Goodman 2005:361). Localism in Europe refers more broadly to "product quality which emphasize[s] territorial provenance in localized socio-ecological processes... where re-localized, embedded food systems... enhance the competitiveness and economic and environmental sustainability of farming" (DuPuis & Goodman 2005:363). It surprised me to find that the farmers I interviewed talked about quality and local in a hybrid fashion, combining the social and environmental benefits alongside the quality assumed within territorial provenance.

DeLind (2011) warns us that we cannot take politicized words like "quality" and "local" at face value, meaning we also cannot take the MBG philosophy for granted. This lends support to Feagan's (2007) argument, drawing upon Ray (1998) and Kneafsey et al. (2001), that words like "local" are bound to the processes of commodification used by "culture economies". Culture economies map the "conditions of production" (Feagan 2007:27) onto specific territories and "cultural system[s]" (Ray 1998:4). We can see culture economies working in Goodman and Goodman's (2009) definition whereby "quality foods" have "definable (and often certifiable) places of origin, and 'distinguished' by taste – that through both materially and socially constructed means, affect a host of assignable characteristics that attempt to set them apart from 'other' foods" (p.1). Yet ontologically, little criteria exist to distinguish "quality" foods from other "quality" commodities. This lack of distinction nudges at the tensions I found between farmers and non-farm vendors in my research, where farmers' food cannot be separated from what non-farm vendors sell at farmers' markets. I showed above that farmers' fresh produce and

meats are already conflated with other foodstuffs, such as baked goods, prepared foods, and preserves, and here I show that farmers' produce happens to also be conflated with other local or quality goods. This conflation decenters the political work of small-scale farming from farmers' markets. For this reason, I follow DeLind (2011) in suggesting that philosophies like MBG mystify what counts as quality and local, and "exchang[e] rhetoric for the harder work of contextual analysis, which in turn may *constrain rather than enable local emancipation*" (p.275, my emphasis), especially in relation to food.

The MBG policy lacks definitional clarity surrounding who is a farmer, what constitutes farm products, and does not delineate the spatial bounds of "local". Without clearly defining these criteria, the policy creates a dilemma for farmers, especially because farmers recognize the benefits that different vendors add to the market to enhance the market's consumer culture. Mark, who sits on the board of directors for one of the three markets he attends, expressed that, "I think you do need to look so you don't get saturated with half wineries and half trinkets and then there's no room for farmers and stuff like that, like you gotta look at it a bit." Mark identifies the challenges faced by board of directors to strike a balance between farm and non-farm vendors. He further suggests that the presence of non-farm vendors should not prevent farmers from having space at these markets. On the flipside, non-farm vendors create a customer draw to the farmers' market, acting similarly to anchor stores in a shopping centre.

Bob and Christine do not see non-farm vendors as an issue at their market because their market prioritizes farm vendors. Speaking of craft vendors, Bob shared:

But they're [craft vendors are] a draw for some people, right? If you want to come to [town name] and see this farmers market, it's way more fun to be there because you can taste gin, you can taste wine, you can taste fudge, you can get authentic Mexican food, you can buy really interesting original painting, you can get a cool beeswax candle, soap, coffee, tea, whatever. They come down, maybe they're coming because that's the kind of shopping they want to do, but you know what? While we're here we may as well grab

dinner tonight, so then I'm a spin off from those people. So, you know it's a symbiotic relationship, but if the balance goes too far towards knickknacky stuff then we may as well just be a mall, right?... So even though it's still consumer culture, at least it's supporting the local economy and it's a little more interesting than the mall.

– Bob, vegetable and egg farmer.

Here Bob embodies European localism by reinforcing the local economy. But Bob draws our attention to something more analytically interesting: farmers' markets actively cater to consumer culture. In some ways, leaning into consumer culture works for farmers when non-farm vendors attract otherwise uninterested customers. This can result in extra sales for farmers. However, such customers do not account for farmers' "regulars", those who purchase from farmers religiously every week. Regulars form the backbone of farmers' livelihoods, keeping small-scale farms economically viable. Some research has shown that although consumers play an important role in sustaining farmers, farmers have other motivations too (Beingessner & Fletcher 2020). The problem arises when the balance between the central organizing theme of farmers' markets – food sovereignty – is lost in pursuit of consumer culture. I suggest this currently happens in many farmers' market organizations.

Using Kate Soper's (2009) alternative hedonism concept – where "the good life" is found through means alternate to those promoted by consumer culture – Johnston and Cappeliez (2017) demonstrate that consumers require pleasure as motivation to purchase food through alternate channels such as farmers' markets. To do this they show that consumers value attractive shopping settings and maximum product choice over ethics, and these values are largely mediated by cultural schemas around food with respect to convenience, selection, and cost (p. 39, 44). Thus, farmers' markets must be organized in a way that holds onto some tenets of consumer culture to purposefully attract customers, focusing on maintaining a selection of

commodities (vendor variety) and attractive stall displays<sup>34</sup>. Vendor variety creates a certain appeal for different types of customers and/or for customers who like a little of both. Then the tensions between farmers and non-farm vendors are not interpersonal in nature but are rather about the tensions of ethical consumption when it interacts with the temptations of consumer culture.

While Bob appreciated the symbiotic relationship between different vendors (as quoted on page 67-68), he remarked upon the differences between different farmers' market organizations across Vancouver Island. He expressed, "I would be horrified if I woke up one morning and I was the only farmer at the market, you know, bookended by people selling knickknacks and that kind of stuff". Bob tells us that farmers recognize the value of non-farm vendors at markets, though farmers should not be outnumbered, or they should at least be well-represented. In other words, although both farmers' market organizations and farmers are pulled into and depend upon the conventions of consumer culture, small-scale farmers like Bob fear the possibility that consumer culture will derail the politics of small-scale farming, alternative food, and local food systems inspiring farmers' markets. Echoing Bob, Carl shared, "I would like to see more farmers and less trinkets at the farmers markets because I believe it feeds on itself, I think if you have more farmers there more people will come". A farmer at a New York farmers' market made a similar statement: "nobody wants to come to a market with six farmers. They want 46." (Griffin & Frongillo 2003:199).

Local food ideologies involve much more than the proximity to food's production (Kloppenburger 1996 as cited in Allen & Guthman 2006). McMahon (2002) defines local food to

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<sup>34</sup> The BC Association of Farmers' Markets provides a wealth of resources on its website for all vendors to make their market display engaging. For example, the BCAFm vendor guide uses a significant amount of space to discuss vendor signage, display styles, and the overall quality of vendor stall appearance. <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/app/uploads/2019/02/bcafim-vendor-guide-602-1.pdf>

include “regenerating rural and inner-city economies, strengthening community, improving community health, protecting ecological biodiversity and ground water quality” (p. 205). Abate (2008) adds to this: environmental sustainability (more broadly), farmland preservation, and maintaining local food traditions. There are, however, more implications. Local food “is a form of cultural resistance as well as economic resistance. It disrupts the disembodiedness and fragmentations of modernity and late capitalism” (McMahon 2002:203). At its core, local food rejects the neoliberal ideologies informing the global food system, including “‘natural’ rules of efficiency, utility maximization, competitiveness, and calculated self-interest” (Kloppenburg et al. 1996:36). Put differently, local food means being resistant to neoliberal relations. Altieri (2009) argues that under food sovereignty, which explicitly opposes neoliberalism, local food focuses on “local autonomy, local markets, and local production-consumption cycles, energy, and technological sovereignty, and farmer-to-farmer networks” (p.111). Yet as Laforge et al. (2017) show, the multifaceted meaning of “local” has been co-opted into broader neoliberal relations which readily disguises the alternative politics of local food. Walk into the grocery section at any Walmart and you will witness this firsthand, where food branded as local has little association to the local food movement and does little to bridge the distance between farmer, land, and consumer. This matters to my discussion of farmers’ markets. I argue that local food has been co-opted for use by other sorts of commodities, leveraging themselves at sites like farmers’ markets which subsequently derails the subversive practices of small-scale farmers. Carroll and Greeno (2013) make a similar argument about the co-optation of environmentalism, stating that “contemporary capitalism co-opts its potential opposition and organizes consent to an unjust, unsustainable way of life” (p.122). More dangerously, however, when farmers’ markets are not organized with farmers’ and food sovereignty as its central mandate, they risk becoming

a local rendition of neoliberal market relations, a poor bedfellow for small-scale farmers. Current farmers' market policies, at least on Vancouver Island, effectively undermine the ethos of local food, especially if farmers' markets are really meant for farmers. I saw just that at the markets I attended, which led me to ask: where are the farmers?

I shift my focus now to consider how tensions between farmers and non-farm vendors play out. As their markets grew, farmers' market organizations needed specific ways to address the disparate needs of farm and non-farm vendors. But it is actually a deeper project. Few farmers' markets are run by farmers or farmer organizations. Many, though not all, are run by paid coordinators. The existence of paid market coordinators is documented elsewhere in farmers' market organizations, often associated with markets in larger places or with a longer history (Gillespie et al. 2007). Thus, the politics and ecological ethics driving most of the farmers in the local food movement (Altieri 2009; Altieri 2010; Fairbairn 2010; Wittman 2010) are not incorporated into the ethos of how farmers markets are run. Neither do farmers' market organizing bodies and paid coordinators typically understand that the word "local" is a proxy for a network of different kinds of relationships (McMahon 2002; Dupuis & Goodman 2005; Feagan 2007). More recently, I have been told that even the commitment to local is being weakened in favour of meeting consumer demands. Some markets choose to definitively define farmers to account for differences from other vendor types. Typically, it appeared that farmers, not other vendors, were defined within market organizations. Three farmers in my study felt these definitions unfair. Emily and Jim shared a story of a fellow farmer who despite their best efforts, straddled boundaries over which vendor category they would fit, farmer or food vendor. I will name these farmers Olivia and Kai. We can see that market rules and policies that are not

grounded in the realities of farming actually shift markets from enabling local farms and farmers like Olivia and Kai below, to focus on other kinds of consumer goods.

Emily: There's another farm that's an apple orchard, because of the seasonal farmer definition they (Olivia and Kai) started doing baked goods, so most of the year, most of what they're selling is baked goods with their apples.

Jim: With their apples that they've saved from last year... But now they [also started to] sell you know fritters and donut holes.

Emily: So, they visually don't come across as a farm, what you might think of as a farm...

Jim: But because of the changes [that started to penalize farmers with seasonal produce], I mean they were content in the past just to show up when the apple season happened and then go home when they were finished, but because of the changes, in order to be a farmer you have to sign up for the whole year, [even if your products are seasonal – like blueberries or strawberries] you can't just drop in, you have to be there a certain number of markets out of them all, and then if you're not showing up then you're not getting your points so if you only show up for two or three months out of the year eventually your seniority will be eroded to the point where you might not be able to have a spot at all. So, they were forced to have to come, and you can't just show up with you know a few you know probably [apple] trees and expect to have it worth your time. So, then they started selling these baked goods from their apple products, and so that was not, well people saw that and said well "you're a farmer but you're not really a farmer, you're a food vendor".

- Emily and Jim, vegetable, poultry, and small-livestock farmer.

There are a few things to unpack here. Pressed by the demands for increased stall availability, this market organization's board of directors attempted to balance the demands of both farmers and non-farm vendors. To do this, the farmers' definition frequently changed. Whether intentional or not, this complicated the lives of farmers who had sold at the market prior to the definition changes in 2016, and for those who, given the nature of their farms and their crops or products, could not reasonably sell "farm product" year-round. Unlike much manufacturing or industry, the agro-ecological nature of farming typically requires land to be rested, cover crops planted, seeds started, farm equipment to be repaired, sheep to lamb, fences repaired, and so on (Altieri 2009). It is puzzling to see a non-seasonal logic imposed onto the seasonality of farming. This demonstrates what Kloppenburg et al. (1996:39) stated, where there is "a tendency to focus on the activities of business rather than people". The seniority points

system generally allows long standing farmers with good attendance to maintain seniority over newer vendors, guaranteeing a stall at the market, and often a permanent stall location.

Following the change in definitions however, Olivia and Kai now straddled the definition of sometimes-farmer-sometimes-food-vendor. It became increasingly difficult to accrue seniority points because the market's new attendance guidelines required farmers to not only sign up for the full season but attend every market. Without farm products to sell all season long, Olivia and Kai improvised with value-added food, which is decidedly not a farm product. They did this to avoid losing their seniority points and subsequently their permanent stall at the market (which is in high demand). The new attendance expectations could not adequately account for farmers like Olivia and Kai.

Paul, who keeps an apple orchard, has encountered similar complications at his farmers' market. Previously, Paul sold at the market after his apples had ripened, meaning he only paid for the days that he marketed. Whereas now the updated stall allocation policies required him to pay for the entire season in full. He explains:

This last year we were a package [pay for the entire marketing season upfront as opposed to paying based on when in attendance] which means we should have been marketing in July, and we didn't end up going in there until September so we paid for a month and a half basically when, well just about a few months I guess when we weren't vending, so our cost to revenue would be significantly higher than most other years, we would just drop-in in the past and then we'll probably go back to drop-in in the future because we just don't seem to have enough product. Yeah apples don't ripen for us early enough to really take advantage of the package they offered, so.

– Paul, apple farmer.

Limited and designated by crop seasonality, single-crop farmers like Paul have an exclusive marketing season. Although Paul's market preaches farmer priority, his experience evinces the market's lack of recognition or understanding about the seasonality of farming and unrealistic attendance expectations for seasonal farmers. The new stall allocation policies left

Paul with two choices. On the one hand, Paul could pay in full for the season, securing a stall for when his apples mature<sup>35</sup>. On the other, he risks having a guaranteed stall altogether, if choosing the new drop-in option. Further, without purchasing a stall Paul risked losing his seniority points. Neither are optimal choices from a business standpoint. The former choice meant lower farm revenues than previous years. The latter choice risked lower revenues should there be no available drop-in stalls. This allows us to see that the business optimization logic applied to farmers' markets is very much at odds with the realities of small-scale, agroecological farming, and subsequently puts farmers in a bind.

From Terrance's perspective, non-farm vendors were bothered by a small influx of new farmers to his market. However, Terrance's quote below shows us that a loose "farmer" definition allowed non-farmers to be classified as farmers to gain a stall at the market. Following an institutional ethnographic perspective, I believe this, in part, has to do with the BCAFM guideline which requires a market to have 51% food vendors, to be considered a farmers' market.

Over the past 3 years there have been quite a few new farms, not a lot, but a few, and on top of that a few businesses started saying they were farms when they were maybe selling tacos and putting a little bit of the kale from their garden in there, that's because that actually according to the rules made them a farm, and so what happens is these people came in and according to the rules they can bump craft vendors who have been there for like 20 years. That in a way is not cool obviously, so there was a bit of a, there was an outcry. The board consequently put in a rule capping the number of farms I think it's, I want to say 25 farms, 10x10 spaces for farms, or something like that, and any new farms will have to go on a waiting list, whereas before farms had priority and that's about it.

– Terrance, vegetable and poultry farmer.

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<sup>35</sup> As an aside, I recognize that some farmers and others reading this may feel adversely about single-crop farmers because theirs is not an ecological farming practice. However, that may be, my job involves presenting the information given to me by the farmers in my study. Further, Paul does keep other foods such as corn, edible pea pods, raspberries, and blackberries, however these are not the backbone of Paul's business, nor does he market them every year.

Terrance shows us that market definitions can trouble both farmers and non-farm vendors alike. This market's former "farmer" definition granted any vendor selling something they grew, even in marginal amounts, to qualify as a farmer. At that time, farmers maintained priority over non-farm vendors, entitling farmers to market stalls even if at market capacity. This meant farmers could bump non-farm vendors. Together, the loose farmer definition and farmer-priority unveiled an unintentional loophole. This benefited prospective vendors and subsequently displaced long-time craft vendors. The market manager responded by capping the total number of farm stalls and narrowing the farmer definition. Terrance indicates that all was not well following these organizational changes. For example, farmers like Olivia and Kai (who sell at this market) had troubles fitting the new farmer definition. Further, the farmer-cap prevented new farmers from accessing the market at all.

The definitional issues across markets do not necessarily indicate limitations of farmers' markets themselves. Instead, they represent the limitations of bureaucratic classification and organizational practices. Farmers' markets, among others, deploy bureaucratic responses to larger social and political problems. On the one hand, exemplified by the above market, the seniority points system did not protect senior vendors from displacement. On the other hand, the above market's response penalized farmers when farmers themselves were not responsible for creating the loopholes others had exploited. This tells us that the bureaucratic practices adopted by farmers' markets cannot adequately or equally respond to the realities and needs of both farmers and non-farmers simultaneously. Perhaps farmers' markets should prioritize the needs of farmers.

The tensions between vendors persist. Terrance sympathized with the vendors bumped by the loophole, although his market's management bothered him:

No one else that comes from another farmers' market anywhere can even believe it, it's just set up so badly... farmers are outnumbered by craft vendors there really badly, like probably 10 to 1, and we [farmers] have different needs... the problem is there's a lot of tension between the craft vendors and the farmers there because the needs are so different.

– Terrance, vegetable and poultry farmer.

Terrance identifies that farmers' needs differ from those of non-farmers selling at the market. Emily, selling at the same market as Terrance, remarked that when "observing the regulations applied to other [farmers] at the market seems really complicated where like, sometimes definitions don't really fit the circumstances." Terrance identifies vendors' differing needs. Farmers responded to the farmer cap by organizing a farmer exclusive market. The exclusive market houses both farmers who sell at the primary market and those unable to secure a stall there. Unfortunately, the exclusive market has poorer attendance than the primary market. Jim and Emily detail their differing experiences between the primary and farmers-only markets:

[Primary market] is by far busier and more, it's longer in the season, has more customers. The [farmers-only market] is smaller but maybe because of that, maybe because of other things the vibe of [farmers-only], people often like that better, it's not as crowded, it's just focused on food and farming, there's no, none of the other crafters or artisans, so there's a different feel to it but I mean financially the [Primary market] is better for us.

– Jim, vegetable, poultry, and small-livestock farmer.

Emily and Jim, as well as several other farmers made it clear that well-established markets, existing for 10 or more years prove more lucrative than their less-established counterparts. With that said, Jim explained that the farmers-only market feels different given it chiefly focuses on farming and food. This has not prevented farmers from desiring a permanent stall at the primary market, however. The farmers-only market is a reasonable place-keeper to sustain farmers hoping to get access to the primary market.

Theresa suggested that on Southern Vancouver Island, farmers are earning less at farmers' markets than they previously had. After selling her herbs and starters at farmers'

markets for the last 10 years (at the time of our interview), she made the tough decision to stop selling at farmers' markets all together. She explains:

I think actually, it's gotten harder to make a good income from the farmers markets for us in recent years, and I think that there's a lot of different factors contributing to that, but I think not being able to go to [farmers' market name] because we had a pretty good following there after being there for so long and kind of trying out this other market and finding that we couldn't even come close to a comparable you know weekly income from that, but I think next year we're not going to be doing a weekly market, we're just kinda gonna do a few of the event markets, yeah so it's kind of a transition time for us, we're moving away from that.

- Theresa, herb farmer.

Theresa's initial farmers' market buzzed with customers and her farm-business soared. Her time at this market formed her dependable customer base and enabled her to establish a successful farm storefront. She also diversified her farm income through offering educational programs for farmers or aspiring gardeners alike. However, her market's environment began to change. Once one of few markets, now multiple farmers' markets have sprung up around Southern Vancouver Island. Whereas she once earned a steady income from her market, her earnings now have dwindled. Theresa attributed this to the increase of farmers' markets in the area, which diluted the customer base. She explains:

So many farmers markets have come about in the last you know, somewhere like 5 years... and then all of a sudden it's like boom, there's farmers markets in like every community... and on the one hand it's great 'cause it's creating this local economy but on the other hand it really dilutes the customer base. When I was at [farmers' market name] for the first few years, like maybe half of my time there, 4 or 5 years, it would, it was, I made a really excellent income there and then the crowds just got less and less and less, because people didn't have to come out to [farmers' market name] they could just go to their own little community to get what they needed, I still had a really strong following and people would come to the market just to buy our plants, but it wasn't as busy as it used to be, so that's one of the reasons we've just decided to move away from the farmers' market thing, 'cause it's just become harder with so many farmers' markets available, it's become harder to make a living, just going to one of them, and what I've found is that most farmers just end up having to go to many markets to kind of make up that weekly income.

- Theresa, herb farmer.

According to Theresa, the increase in farmers' markets did not positively impact farmers. Instead, this increase spread out the customer base, meaning less foot traffic and ultimately less income. Therefore, farmers needed to attend more markets to make ends meet. Jason echoed Theresa's statement in a separate interview:

Kora Liegh: I know there has been a surge in farmers' markets in [Southern Vancouver Island] over the last several years, how has that been for you?

Jason: It's not great. It just spreads out where everyone is shopping, which means I have to devote more and more resources going to more markets. I would like to just go to one market and sell everything I bring. And yeah, I just can't do that especially as more and more markets appear. So I think it's good for consumers, not great for farmers.

- Jason, vegetable farmer.

Jason tells us that attending more markets increased his workload and used more resources. The farmers in my study each described the extent of work required to prepare for market day. For produce farmers, harvesting, washing, and packing their produce typically takes a whole day. For animal farmers such as cattle and chickens, their 'harvest' happens on the day their animals go to the abattoir. Produce farmers, especially, find it difficult to attend multiple markets to make ends meet because this requires significantly more labour, resources, and time than previously. Without a reliable prediction of how many customers to expect when attending new and different farmers' markets, farmers have trouble estimating how much to harvest and end up harvesting too much or too little, both resulting in economic losses. In addition, farmers also told me that time at the market means time off the farm, and time is valuable.

More markets but less customers might nudge some farmers towards wholesaling. The additional labour time to attend more markets can make wholesaling appear more compelling, as it requires less time and resources, and promises less distributional challenges. Farmers would no longer have to find multiple customers if selling to a corporate buyer, which contrasts with

finding multiple buyers at farmers' markets, CSAs, and farm-gate sales. Such economic logic, tying back to Chapter 4, is how the ruling relations can ultimately shape farmers' markets<sup>36</sup>. For those opposed to selling to corporate buyers, it might mean finding alternate venues, perhaps a local restaurant or small grocer.

A news source substantiates Theresa and Jason's claims (Goodman 2019); despite more farmers' markets across the province, farmers fare worse than before. More farmers' markets do not prevent farmers from facing financial uncertainty. Farmers depend upon reliable "income markets". Experienced farmers can sometimes make up for the lack of farmers' market sales with farm-gate sales or other means, should they wish to pursue them. However, not all farmers want customers coming to their farm unannounced because it often takes them away from their farm duties. As for new farmers, their farming future hinges upon the successful marketing experiences now in short supply.

## 5.2 Discussion

"Farmer" definitions require fluidity for market managers to fully capture the diverse nature of what it means to be a farmer and to farm. Alternative and ecological farming have no singular definition; farming practices change based on time, place, and space, and farming practices are at the whim of external and internal situations both on and off the farm, whether concurrently or asynchronously. Market managers who organize alternative farming practices into neatly definable categories are unable to fully include undefinable, specific, and embodied ways of knowing and doing. Because alternative farming encourages place-specific farming

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<sup>36</sup> I accredit this insight to Dr. Carroll. He pointed me toward drawing connections from the interview excerpt to seeing the ruling relation of economic thought.

practices, it resists the neatly bound and definable classifications afforded to conventional farming; for this reason, farmer definitions require fluidity. Whereas some alternative farming practices prevail outside of the local, the value of local food systems lay within farm practices specific to their local ecosystems.

Aside from definitional issues, exclusionary rules and unrealistic requirements unfairly affect farmers. This indicates that many managers have lost sight of farmers' needs. In an ideal organization, market managers would steadfastly support small-scale farmers. If unequivocally for farmers, farmers' markets ought to remain as positively embedded within the ideology of AFNs as is possible given their local context. Market managers can attain this by committing to the transgressive politics advocated by AFNs<sup>37</sup>, accomplished partially by pushing-back against the demands of conventional economic organization<sup>38</sup>. Paul, Olivia, and Kai's experiences exemplify the differing needs farmers have of their farmers' market(s). In their instances, rigidity did not work in their favour. Instead, single-crop, small-scale farmers require definitional "space" because their crop's seasonality narrows when farmers have "product" to sell. Olivia, Kai, and Paul's experiences illustrate the growing pains farmers endure as their organizations grow. When Paul's market's attendance policies and definitions changed, he had little choice but to tolerate the consequences, even if his farming practices remained the same. Olivia and Kai adapted to changing definitions and attendance requirements by making baked goods from their

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<sup>37</sup> Again, I emphasize that the specifics can appear different depending upon the local context of the market. Additionally, there exists no universal 'right' way to organize farmers' markets or other AFNs as long as farmers are supported and uninhibited by their organization.

<sup>38</sup> As explained in Chapter Four.

apples<sup>39</sup> which eventually risked their farmer status (at the market, not socially). As Bob tells me, “what are you [regulations and rules] trying to achieve?”

It may appear that the solution to this complex scenario would be to expand farmers’ market capacities. However, the spatial capacity of farmers’ markets engages with infrastructures and institutions larger than itself: the municipality and neighbouring businesses. Farmers shared that at least four of the market organizations in my study had strained relationships with local businesses in the vicinity and their municipalities. Nine farmers held that some local businesses felt as though the market hindered their storefronts or took away from their proceeds. Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) documented a similar issue at a Stratford, UK farmers’ market. Farmers concluded that these strained relations resulted in municipalities placing time and zoning restrictions upon their markets. Although surrounding businesses typically regarded farmers’ markets in a positive light, a BCAFM report (2012) demonstrates that some business owners do not. In this report at least 8.1% of neighbouring businesses perceived a negative impact on their earnings, with 5.1% stating somewhat negative, 3% stating negative, and 2% stating very negative; 29.3% indicated no effect with the remaining 60.6% reporting a range from somewhat positive to very positive (BCAFM 2012: 16). Farmers’ market organizations are not always well-received, as is evidenced by the farmers I interviewed and both the BCAFM’s (2012) and Holloway & Kneafsey’s (2000) findings. As such, markets negatively received by surrounding businesses have needed to impose time restrictions that strictly regulate their operating hours and prohibits farmers from selling outside of operating hours. Sometimes time restrictions come from the market’s municipality. Five farmers shared that their market’s time restrictions sometimes

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<sup>39</sup> Canning, preserving, and pickling foods is within the canon of alternative food practices, so Olivia and Kai’s adaptation was well within sentiment of alternative food politics.

prevented them from making sales when interested patrons visited the market during set up or shut down. However, time restrictions serve a purpose, like ensuring customer safety while vendors drive-in to unload or pack-up their product. The time restrictions only apply on the designated site, meaning that farmers and customers can walk off market grounds to complete the sale; some farmers chuckled at this workaround.

Throughout academic literature, local food initiatives are often encouraged to “scale up” (DeLind 2002; Johnston & Baker 2005; Friedmann 2007; Beckie et al. 2012; Kurtz 2015; Pitt & Jones 2016; Milestead et al. 2017). However, I fear that scale up talk has been misinterpreted across farmers’ markets organizations. In local food systems talk, scaling up is often about increasing the volume of farm products and its distribution to a wider consumer base (Friedmann 2007; Milestead et al. 2014). In economic terms, “scaling up” refers to increasing the labour force or the technology treadmill to increased efficiency and profits (Zhang 2005). Translated to farmers’ markets, scaling up looks like the optimization of market space, stalls, and the increase of available vendors. There is, however, little crossover between scaling up market space to scaling up local food. Scale up efforts burdens farmers in contradicting ways, because while farmers are dependent upon non-farm vendors (crafters, artisanal items, value-added products, etc.) to attract customers for a well-attended farmers’ market; yet non-farm vendors push markets to their capacity. Increasing the overall number of vendors (and theoretically, the number of customers) does not mean that more farmers attend, nor does it ensure that existing farm-vendors will sell or carry more of their farm product. In fact, non-farm vendors typically occupy much if not most of available market spaces at farmers’ markets. Lyson, Gillespie, and Hilchey (1995) support this point by suggesting that crafters are driving the farmers’ market boom. Farmers’ markets operating at capacity because of non-farm vendors often limit new farmers from joining,

while simultaneously reducing income for the already established farmers because customers' resources are divided. Although non-farm vendors disadvantage farmers in many ways, neither farmers, non-farm vendors, nor market managers will want to make changes. This contradiction is troubling, largely because without the ability to draw customers to farmers' markets, farmers face economic collapse and the folding of their farm business. To parse out this point I must first explain the two meanings of farmers' market success.

First, from hearsay (I did not interview market managers) I gathered that a market is considered successful by market managers if it attracts large numbers of customers, and secondly, if the market is at vendor capacity. However, what is deemed a successful market by market managers or non-farm vendors is not necessarily the same for farmers. For example, Donald expressed that market managers have "an opinion there that more vendors is the answer, well more vendors in that market has done nothing but water down the sort of pie of money that's coming through the door". This is a source of tension between these groups, which is evidenced by the farmers' experiences with non-farm vendors and the market organization's response to the conflict, as I discussed above. These tensions are exacerbated when markets give farmers priority over other kinds of vendors, or conversely, if the market does not prioritize farmers at all. Paralleling my interpretations of the meanings of success in Vancouver Island farmers' markets, Gillespie et al. (2007:81) show that among the markets they studied across the United States:

the farmers' markets that contribute the most to local food system development are those organized and conducted with *more deliberate community development intent*. Their success stems from the strategic dedicated actions of individuals and groups who have identified needs and recognized challenges which they have worked steadily to overcome. However, the practical details of how this happens, noting both accomplishments and setbacks, tend to be downplayed in most of the celebratory accounts of farmers' markets. This bias may create undue optimism about the ease of starting or improving farmers' markets and the prospects for their success.

Farmers' market organizations might do best to remember DeLind's (2002) account of civic agriculture, to emphasize "agriculture as civic, as opposed to a purely economic issue, [which] is a liberating departure from the rational prison of neoclassical thought" (p. 217). DeLind (2002) argues that despite the many efforts in civic agriculture, there is still a dependence "upon traditional market relations... framed by the economic or commercial transaction" (p. 218) and further that "economic expansion remains the measure of success" (p. 219). Head (2015) argues that in the pursuit of agroecological philosophy and practice, our attention must turn away from the emphasis on consumption. From my view, it appears farmers' markets are doing just the opposite, even though they operate as markets.

I argue that farmers' markets need to prioritize farm-vendors by fostering a habitable and protected marketplace for small-scale, ecological farmers. Part of this requires a critical eye to how we evaluate farmers' market success. This does not mean doing away entirely with economic indicators, but instead looking to their guiding philosophies – food sovereignty, agroecology, and/or civic agriculture – to support economically, morally, and socially, and enable small-scale farmers and local food. For farmers' market organizations to meet these philosophical pursuits, they need to hold farmers as a central focus. Otherwise, farmers' markets exist as a form of what Gramsci calls a "passive revolution" where "counter-hegemonic challenges to the dominant capitalist order are co-opted and neutralised through changes and concessions which re-establish the consent in that order" (Wanner 2015:25). That is, farmers' markets swap food sovereignty and local food values in pursuit of capitalist gains. In a way, it seems that farmers exist as a cover story for farmers' markets, allowing feel-good consumerism, however without the substance of radical food politics that others argue is a critical aspect of farmers' markets (ie. Gillespie et al. 2007).

Although the growing number of farmers' markets might be taken to imply the success of the local food movement, the above farmers' experiences tell us otherwise. Instead, the increase in farmers' markets benefits non-farm vendors and spreads small-scale farmers thin. Jason stated that, "all the markets are struggling to have enough farmers, none of them except [farmers' market name] have enough." This confirms Lyson et al.'s (1995) suggestion that farmers' markets are driven by craftspeople. The boom of farmers' markets across Vancouver Island is likely driven by craftspeople and artisans, not by farmers.

### **5.3 Concluding Thoughts**

There are two lines of thought in this chapter. First, I consider that farmers both depend upon, yet at times are hindered by the presence of crafters and other vendors at markets. Second, we must recognize that farmers' markets, although outwardly projecting under the auspices of the local, are at risk of, or are already diluted to the indeterminacy of the global, through organizing nearly identically across space and place. It is my suggestion, then, that farmers' market managers must re-center farmers and food sovereignty in their organizations. More importantly, each organization must take account of the farmers specific to *their* organization to determine their needs, as individual farmers' needs vary for many reasons. My suggestion is in line with Kirwan's (2004) assertion that "individual markets require enlightened management that can provide the practicalities of variety and [economic] viability, and yet ensure the continuance of FMs as an AS [alternative strategy]" (p. 411). And further, the farmers in Griffin and Frongillo's (2003) study shared that they wanted FMs to have the intent of being fairer to farmers (p.198).

To conclude, I would like to share a small story. While reading “Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls” to my daughter, I learned about Ameenah Gurib-Fakim. She is a Mauritian chemist (and former president) fighting to save Maruitius’ biodiverse plant-life. Gurib-Fakim seeks to protect the benjoin plant. Benjoin is particularly fascinating because it evolved to grow differently shaped leaves to deter predators from eating it. To strengthen current farmers’ market organizations, these markets should take inventory of *their* farmers’ needs, and not just small-scale farmers in general. Varied market organization and structure would be difficult to co-opt and replicate globally because they would take no singular form, potentially protecting small-scale farmers. This may protect the “local” from confusion with the “extra-local” and reposition local farmers and food as the central organizing theme of farmers’ markets.

## Chapter Six: Ecological Farmers – To Certify or Not?

*“The closest you can be to being organic, is being organically certified”*

– Participant at Farmer 2 Farmer Conference,  
March 1, 2018, Southern Vancouver Island, BC

*“I think some farmers, at least from what I’ve talked to people, don’t want to become certified cause it does place a lot of restrictions on you...”*

– Gloria, vegetables and flowers (non-certified, ecological farmer)

Organic certification is a charged and contentious topic among small-scale farmers on Vancouver Island. At farmers’ markets, many farmers often disagree on this issue. For some, to be an organic farmer you must be certified organic, as I show with the opening quotation. For others like Gloria, to follow the parameters set forth by organic certification boards is as good as being certified. Some farmers do what they call “beyond organic”, where they exceed the parameters of organic certification. My initial research interest looked to understand how regulations organize farmers’ lives. Organic certification appeared to be the most pertinent regulation form currently concerning farmers. This chapter investigates recent regulation on the use of the term organic by farmers in British Columbia and farmers’ perceptions about organic certification in general.

Of the 16 farmers who participated in this research project, one farmer had their farm organically certified, two farmers were not following organic practices, and the remaining 13 farmers grew by their standard, organically. That is, the majority of farmers I interviewed considered themselves to be farming organically, whether they were formally certified or not. As we will see, the terms “organic” and ecological” do not necessarily signify the same thing for most farmers. Until relatively recently organic was a kind of everyday shorthand of connoting the practices of farming ecologically. Farmers believe that customers understand this language. For certified organic farmers, organic has some very precise connotations,

requirements, and regulatory processes. As of 2018, BC's government enforced a new regulation restricting who could call their farm organic. This new regulation stirred strong tensions among some farmers selling at farmers' markets. As I will show, some farmer tensions come from the general lack of consumer understanding of how food is produced and the association of organic foods with health benefits. For farmers, however, the term organic seems to relate more directly to their concern with ecological practices. I will begin with an analysis of the consultation process leading to this regulation.

### 6.1 British Columbia's Organic Certification Regulation

From 1993 until the end of 2016, organic certification in British Columbia was regulated by the Organic Agricultural Products Certification Regulation B.C. Reg 200/93 (OAPCR) under the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act (SBC 2000). This prevented non-certified producers from using "British Columbia Organic Certified" or using the British Columbia Certified Organic symbol (see Figure 1). This regulation did not restrict non-certified producers from using the term "organic".

**Figure 3: British Columbia Certified Organic symbol<sup>40</sup>**



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<sup>40</sup> Certified Organic Program Symbol User's Guide August 2012, ver. 2

In 2015 the BC Ministry of Agriculture began consultations with Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC), certified organic farmers, and uncertified organic and ecological farmers to discuss regulating the use of the term organic in food and beverages grown and produced in BC. These consultations resulted in the Organic Certification Regulation (OCR) (B.C. Reg. 304/2016) replacing OAPCR as of January 1, 2017. The OCR falls under the Food and Agricultural Products Classification Act (FAPC) (SBC 2016 Chapter 1). An amendment to the OCR on January 1, 2018 made the term “organic” a protected label (B.C. Reg. 304/2016 Appendix 2). The FAPC stated that the use of a protected label is “restricted or prohibited unless a person meets the requirements of, or is permitted by, the regulations” (FAPC 2.3 (d)). To clarify, under the OAPCR (now inactive) and OCR (now active), producers could advertise their products as organic, however they could not use the phrasing “British Columbia Certified Organic” or its associated symbol. As of September 1, 2018, when the amendment became effective, the OCR no longer allowed producers to use the word “organic” in any written or verbal advertising. This included any “(a) other grammatical forms of that term, (b) phonetic representations of that term, and (c) abbreviations and symbols for that term.” (B.C. Reg 304/2016 Appendix 2 12 (1)). The new regulation concerned many farmers who grow with organic practices but have opted not to pursue certification for reasons I will explore below.

Before I discuss why many farmers decided against certification, it is helpful to first explore the reasons many small-scale farmers felt disadvantaged by this new regulation. The evidence may be found in the *BC Certified Organic Program Consultation: Summary of Stakeholder Input* report (2015) and the *Ministry of Agriculture Intentions Paper: Certification for Organic Food & Beverage Products (2015)* (hitherto referred as consultation report and intentions paper, respectively).

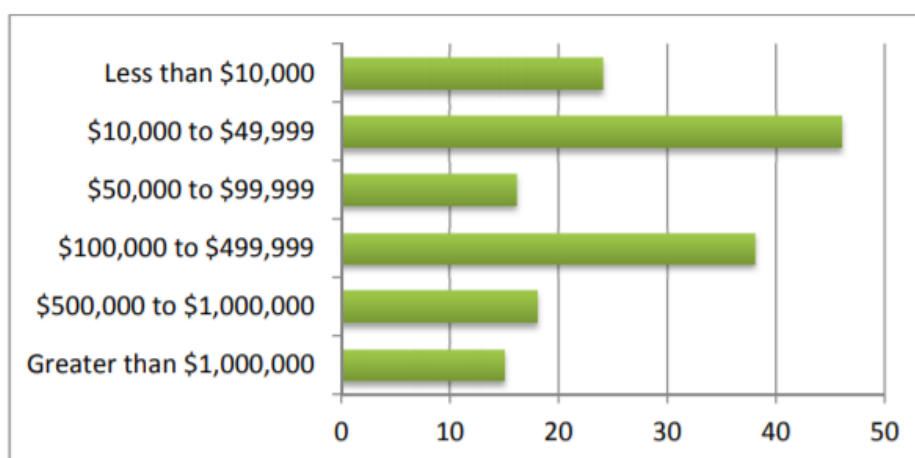
The consultation between the Ministry of Agriculture and “industry stakeholders” consisted of a four-point proposed regulation that would: (1) regulate the use of the term “organic” for consumer confidence; (2) develop strategies to help non-certified farmers obtain their certification; (3) “develop... a compliance and enforcement system”; and (4) investigate options for marketing BC organic foods (Consultation report:1). The proposed regulation was sent to 178 farmers, associations, and businesses. In reply, the consultation group received 195 completed surveys and 86 emails, for a total of 281 responses (Consultation report:1). The report also stated that “the majority of the email responses expressed support for the proposed model” (Consultation report:4), although it neglects to indicate a number or percentage for how many of those emails were in support of the model. Overall, the lack of transparency and rigor on how participants were selected is troubling. Without indicating how farmers, associations, and businesses were sampled, the “stakeholder input” appears to be a flawed consultation containing elements of confirmation bias. The intentions paper states that of the non-certified farmers who participated in the consultations, 23% plan to become certified under the new regulation while 40% were unsure (Intentions Paper:2). The consultation report indicates 36% of those who were not certified did not plan on becoming certified (Consultation Report:6). Ministry-appointed Enforcement Officers enforce this legislation and are authorized to request proof of certification and to issue tickets; failure to pay tickets “may result in legal action” (Intentions Paper:4). Threats of legal action are commonplace in enforcing state based agri-food governance and often function to serve the interests of the dominant food system (McMahon & Glatt 2018:34).

54% of respondents reported their annual farm gates sales, as shown in Table 3 (page 90) (Consultation report:4). The number of respondents per income bracket were not provided. The

response rate by annual income bracket is as follows, from highest to lowest: \$10,000–\$49,999 (between 40 to 50 respondents); \$100,000–\$499,000 (between 30 to 40 respondents); <\$10,000 (between 20 to 30 respondents); \$500,000–\$1,000,000 income bracket (close to 20 respondents); \$50,000–\$99,999 (close to 20 respondents); >\$1,000,000 (between 10 to 20 respondents) (Consultation report:4). Providing information on farm income brackets without correlating it to the farmers’ preferences on the proposed legislation only provides vague information about what types of farms responded to the consultation. The 2016 Canadian Census data shows farms earning less than \$10,000 a year make up at least 42% of farms across BC, yet less than 30 of these farms responded to the consultation. This further confirms my concerns about the Ministry of Agriculture’s survey distribution and sampling method.

**Table 3: Approximate annual farm gate sales<sup>41</sup>**

Approximate annual farm gate sales:



\*total responses = 157

The consultation report also fails to mention how many associations and businesses were

<sup>41</sup> Consultation Report:4.

included in the consultation. Associations benefitting from more stringent regulation around organic would undoubtedly be in favor of the proposed model. A breakdown in number of farm respondents, association respondents, and business respondents would again facilitate better understanding of who is in favor of or against the proposed model.

It would be helpful to know the size or scale of farms included in the consultation, that is, the total farmed area of a respondent's farm (by square footage or acreage). DeLind and Howard (2008) suggest that the scale of farming operations should be taken into consideration when implementing regulatory standards, as small-scale farming operations are often restrained by broad-stroke policies intended for managing issues endemic to large-scale operations. Although their paper speaks specifically to the effects food safety standards have on small-scale operations, it still enables us to see the effects of regulating the term "organic" could have on small-scale farmers in BC. For example, McMahon (2011) shows how small-scale livestock farmers and meat processors across BC were constrained after standardized meat production regulations were enforced (in the name of food-safety). There is a parallel between the argument of scale to food safety and that of state regulated use and enforcement of the term "organic". DeLind and Howard (2008) argue that there is a "need to find the culprit and the cure" (p. 305) of those responsible for compromising food safety. The same can be said about finding those responsible for supposedly tarnishing the integrity of certified organic farmers. Such regulations often largely miss the crux of the problem they intend to solve. In the case of the integrity of organic growers, the overall drive behind further regulating the term organic largely misses the evidence that organic standards "continue to be adjusted (others might say, eroded) to make them, and the organic label, more compatible with the needs of large-scale growers and processors" (DeLind & Howard:308). The sentiment behind legislation which restricts small-

scale, ecological farmers is not one that promotes diversity of the ecological or economic sorts, and in that sense would go against the principles of what it means to be an organic farmer.

The consultation report shows 36% of respondents indicated restricting the term organic would level the playing field<sup>42</sup> (Consultation report:7). The Intentions Paper (Intentions Paper:2, 4) echoes this, though who benefits from this is unclear. Farms earning less than \$50,000 a year make up 68.5% of farms across BC (Canadian Census 2016). Farmers earning less than \$50 000 per year, who may wish to be certified, do not have the means to cope with the added financial stress and burdensome bureaucracy which this entails. This is evidenced by DeLind & Howard (2008) who state, “expanded paperwork and oversight have proven to be far more burdensome financially and procedurally for smaller processors than for larger ones” (p. 307). A “minority of respondents are concerned about the negative cost impact on small producers and the impact on relationships within the farming community” which the report says would be addressed with “educational programs, outreach, and public relations campaigns” (Consultation report:7).

Despite these concerns, under the new regulation there is an additional cost above that required to become certified, albeit scaled to the overall income of the farm yet not evenly so (see Table 4, page 93). For example, a farm earning less than \$10,000 a year is required to pay to \$71.60 to the certifying administrator, equivalent to 0.716% of their annual farm income, whereas a farm earning more than \$7.5 million a year is required to pay \$1,978, equivalent to 0.0264% of the farm’s annual income (see Table 5, page 94). Table 5 demonstrates that as income for the farm increases, the fee proportionately decreases when considered as a percentage of the farm’s overall income. A fee that is not an equal percentage of farm income across all income brackets

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<sup>42</sup> The report did not indicate if other respondents felt restricting the term would not level the playing field. This demonstrates the flimsy nature of this report.

is not a regulatory move which “levels the playing field” and does little to encourage small-scale farmers to get their certification.

**Table 4: Table of Fees<sup>43</sup>**

Column 1 Item	Column 2 Gross Sales Revenue (\$)	Column 3 Fee (\$)
1	< 10k	71.60
2	10k – < 20k	99.10
3	20k – < 30k	126.60
4	30k – < 40k	154.10
5	40k – < 50k	181.60
6	50k – < 60k	209.10
7	60k – < 70k	236.60
8	70k – < 80k	264.10
9	80k – < 90k	291.60
10	90k – < 100k	344.10
11	100k – < 125k	371.60
12	125k – < 150k	399.10
13	150k – < 175k	426.60
14	175k – < 200k	454.10
15	200k – < 300k	534.10
16	300k – < 400k	589.10
17	400k – < 500k	694.10
18	500k – < 750k	797.50
19	750k – < 1M	1 258.00
20	1M – < 2.5M	1 313.00
21	2.5M – < 5M	1 368.00
22	5M – < 7.5M	1 923.00
23	> 7.5M	1 978.00

McMahon (2011) demonstrates that when consulting with the BC government from 2004 to 2007 about impending meat inspection regulations, concerns from small-scale livestock farmers in the province went unheard. Question 4 of the consultation report (p.5) shows that 24%

<sup>43</sup> B.C. Reg 304/2016 Schedule 3 (2).

of respondents were from a “certifying body, consultant, verification officer and the like,” potentially meaning that the favourability of stakeholder input was partly skewed by these respondents. 55% of respondents were organically certified while 24% of the respondents were not (Consultation report:5). Given this information and the data I gathered, it is within reason to assume that few farmers believed that the government's regulatory decisions to regulate the term “organic” were driven by democratic impulses.

**Table 5: Percentage of farm income to fees due per Table 4**

<b>Gross Sales Revenue</b>	<b>Percentage of income</b>
< 10k	0.716 %
10k – < 20k	0.991 % – 0.495 %
20k – < 30k	0.633 % – 0.422 %
30k – < 40k	0.513 % – 0.385 %
40k – < 50k	0.454 % – 0.363 %
50k – < 60k	0.418 % – 0.349 %
60k – < 70k	0.394 % – 0.338 %
70k – < 80k	0.377 % – 0.330 %
80k – < 90k	0.365 % – 0.324 %
90k – < 100k	0.382 % – 0.344 %
100k – < 125k	0.372 % – 0.297 %
125k – < 150k	0.319 % – 0.268 %
150k – < 175k	0.284 % – 0.244 %
175k – < 200k	0.259 % – 0.227 %
200k – < 300k	0.267 % – 0.178 %
300k – < 400k	0.196 % – 0.147 %
400k – < 500k	0.174 % – 0.139 %
500k – < 750k	0.160 % – 0.106 %
750k – < 1M	0.168 % – 0.126 %
1M – < 2.5M	0.131 % – 0.0525 %
2.5M – < 5M	0.0547 % – 0.0273 %
5M – < 7.5M	0.0385 % – 0.0256 %
> 7.5M	0.0264 %

Both the Consultation Report and Intentions Paper justify the restricted use of the term organic by stating it will ensure consumer confidence and to prevent those “who make false organic claims” (Consultation report:7; Intentions paper:2). The consultation report indicates that 36% of respondents indicated restricting the term organic would increase consumer confidence. This largely undermines the experience of direct-marketing sales which characterize how small-scale farmers sell what they raise. A common theme throughout my interviews is that farmers establish trust and rapport with their regulars. Talking about growing practices makes up a large part of interactions between farmer and customer at the farmers’ market. Mark, a vegetable, egg, and poultry farmer, said he stands “eyeball-to-eyeball” with his customers and it does not sit right with him to tell his customers anything but the truth about how he grows. Terrance said, “You’d probably be surprised, there are almost no certified organic farms here, I think I can think of one or two, but it’s such a local market and *everybody knows everybody*”.

The sense that small-scale farmers selling through direct marketing venues could or would make false claims about being organic completely undervalues the sense of naturally occurring community-level regulation, meaning implied relations of trust and honesty, that exists at places like farmers’ markets. Farmers selling at farmers’ markets tend to know the other farmers who sell there and would certainly not allow them to state they are growing organically if they were not. Farmers’ market managers also visit the vending farms from time to time. Non-certified farmers and processors who advertise their products as “organic” without having certified status are said to create “uncertainty” among consumers who “cannot be reliably sure about what practices may or may not be followed by producers or processors who market ‘organic’ food or beverage products” (Intentions Paper:2). Rarely, if ever, during my interviews did the farmers refer to what they raised as “products”. Carl states:

We don't produce commodities, we produce heads of lettuce, we produce chicken eggs, we produce chicken and cabbage and... So, you know, to us none of those are commodities. They're actually food. And we love the idea of enhancing the experience people have of shopping for food, because there's something that we've put, we genuinely love what we do and that comes through when we are there selling it. And so we care about it, people know that we care about it. It means that we will never have a multimillion-dollar business, but we can develop it with efficiencies of the quality that we're producing to get a good living out of it.

– Carl, vegetable, egg, and poultry farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, issues focused on food production have and continue to be a result of food's commodification. Therefore, restricting the use of the word "organic" to only those with organic certifications *may* mitigate any uncertainty about the farmers' growing practices, but it does not mitigate the commodification of food nor consumers' relationship to food. Besides, organic farming was originally intended to be oppositional to industrial agriculture and to "create an 'alternative trade' system to the mainstream market to challenge the capitalist world economy" (Elder et al. 2014:79).

## 6.2 Farmers' Perceptions

Even before the BC Government legally restricted the term organic, some farmers' markets had already imposed this restriction themselves. This required non-certified organic farmers to change their stall signage mid-season. Bob, a farmer who did not intend to formally certify, described his signage:

Our market decided to adopt it early.... if you're not a certified organic vendor at this market, you can't have any signage that uses the word organic. Yeah, our sign is a big chalkboard that says [farm name] at the top and underneath it, it said organically grown and it's like 'oh, I can't have organically grown? And it's August and I'm not going to repaint this frigging sign' so I just took out a little black piece of plastic and changed 'organically' to 'sensationally'. Yeah so then of course, all we got for that was just snickers from the customers. Everyone loved it, right, and it did the trick and in fact it even allowed me to kind of like when people would say 'sensationally grown' it's like 'yeah do you know why that is?' And then I can sort of tell them 'yeah we're not allowed

to use the word organic, and blah blah blah'. And you know if I had a certified organic farm, I'm sure I would be 100% behind that rule, but I don't yet, and so I was like 'oh really, okay, fine' I'm going to change it to *sensationally grown*.

– Bob, vegetable and egg farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer

The rephrasing from “organically grown” to “sensationally grown” is a playful resistance to the new legislation. Initially, it creates “curb appeal” for customers to visit the farm stall at the market, to understand what “sensationally grown” might mean, potentially inviting in customers who would have otherwise passed by. “Sensationally” amplifies curb appeal through his unique word choice which diversifies his marketing pull and even sets him apart from certified organic growers. Secondly, it invites customers to engage with Bob and inquire about his growing methods, provoking an already common and well-documented practice between customers and farmers at farmers’ markets (for example Hinrichs 2000; Kirwan 2004; Smithers et al. 2008). Lastly, it raised political issues and allowed the farmer to talk about their experience of regulations with customers that they may not have had otherwise. However, further legal restrictions on how produce can be described at farmers’ markets (B.C. Reg. 304/2016, Amendments not in force, 1) disciplined the creativity of farmers such as Bob. The amended regulations restricted: “other grammatical forms of the term; phonetic representations of that term; and, abbreviations and symbols for [Organic]”, potentially limiting Bob from using suggestive terminology in a way that would imply “organically” grown.

I asked Bob why he did not certify his farm given that he was growing organically. Initially, he indicated that his personal growing standards “exceed the standards of organic certification”. Gloria gave me more insight into what is locally meant by “beyond organic”:

That's [beyond organic] a really a big term right now, and it's being used a lot, is like “beyond organic” and I think some farmers because they don't, at least from what I've talked to people, they don't want to follow, or they don't want to become certified cause it does place a lot of restrictions on you, in that you like, say you have a neighbour who

has a bunch of manure but they're not certified, but you know they're your neighbour so you know pretty much what they're doing over there.

– Gloria, vegetable and flower farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

The term “beyond organic” adds an important dimension to the issue. “Beyond organic” is characterized by farmers who voluntarily do more than is expected of them by organic growing standards. Farmers who say they are beyond organic refer to various growing practices that are considered more environmentally sustainable than others, and that may not be required by the certified organic standards. Being beyond organic brings the farmer back to the grassroots beginning of the organic farming movement. It has been argued that the organic movement has been co-opted into the same neoliberal framework that it originally sought to be apart from (Guthman, 2004; Jaffee & Howard 2010). BC’s new regulation on the use of “organic” intends to protect and level the playing field for organic producers. However, for many it avoids addressing the co-optation of organic certification that has led to confusion about what qualifies as organic in the first place (Jaffee and Howard 2010). National organic standards have been absorbed into international harmonization efforts to standardize the concept. This involves international regulatory bodies including the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the United Nations’ Codex Alimentarius Commission. Such harmonization is rationalized by the same logic of the BC Ministry of Agriculture attempting to mitigate uncertainty about organic labelled products. Therefore, the organic certification becomes less about the environmental and health values which inspired the original movement and becomes more about international trade, the harmonization of global regulations and standards, and expanding the market for alternatives to conventional food but is still “food from nowhere” (McMichael 2009).

Fifteen of the 16 farmers (94%) I interviewed stated that they followed organic standards or went beyond organic standards and have values grounded in being ecologically sustainable and regionally appropriate. One farmer grew hydroponically, which currently does not fall within socially accepted organic or ecological growing practices. With harmonized and generalizable international organic standards, however, the intricacies and particularities of the local and regional are lost. Some farmers explained to me that even IOPA's additional standards that are required over and above the national standards set down by Canadian Organic Standards (COS) are not directed towards the social or ecological particulars of the Vancouver and Gulf Islands. Of course, such practices are not discouraged, yet they are not embraced or emphasized. Farmers' own ecological and often political values go far beyond checking boxes set forth by some impersonal bureaucratic entity, or a desire to simply align their farming practices with some marketing tactic. Many of these farmers are meticulous in researching what is truly the best environmental practice for what they are trying to grow or raise, what works best for the area where they farm, what can be sourced locally, and finding appropriate alternatives if something cannot be sourced locally. On Vancouver Island, especially, where sourcing organic inputs for the farm is difficult, it begs the question: What is the acceptable distance an organic product can travel before its carbon footprint outweighs any ecological attributes it may have carried? Could it be that the manure from the neighbouring non-organic farmer might be as ecological or even *more* ecological than an organic manure purchased commercially and shipped from some non-local, distant location? McMahon (2002) states, "Buying organic is not necessarily the ecological alternative. One shopping basket of 26 imported organic products in the UK could have travelled 241,000 kms and released as much CO<sub>2</sub>" (p. 4). The idea of beyond organic grapples with such contradictions and tensions within the organic food movement, emphasizing the importance of

grounding organic agricultural practices in their local contexts. This of course does not necessarily fit with the harmonization of international standards.

Again, Bob explains:

I started thinking ‘Oh that’s going to be five-hundred bucks and the odd inspection, I want to keep bureaucracy as far away as possible’, so I didn’t want to go down that road, that was initially where I started. Then, as I grew obviously, well not obvious to you maybe, but I, everything I do is within the practices of certified organic, I don’t believe there’s anything that I’m doing that would not pass the test, right. But then as we developed our market here in this community it became apparent pretty quickly that you become known, people know you personally and know you from the farmers market, so they know me and they trust me and they don’t really care if I’m certified organic because I look them in the eye and they know that I’m not a shyster, so obviously what I say I’m doing, I’m doing. And I have a profile at the market stall that tells people my practices and so if there’s any doubt they can check it and decide if they believe me or not and everyone believes me because they know me. Right. They realize that if people grow it organically that’s good enough, right. And if I really thought that I could earn more money by becoming a certified organic, I would do it, if it’s a black and white decision of ‘oh it costs five-hundred dollars but you’re going to raise your prices incrementally and earn another two-thousand dollars this year’, I would do it. But raising prices as far as a market is tough to do, it’s not tough to do. You can do it whenever you want, you can set your prices, but it would be an incremental raise, so how can I raise my prices by two percent? Or I guess I could cut down the size of my portions by two percent, but I don’t, I’m just not really behind it personally. So, I just don’t have, I can’t be bothered to go there you know, because there’s no huge benefit, I don’t particularly agree with it, so I’m just going to stick with what I’ve got.

– Bob, vegetable and egg farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

Two important points are raised in Bob’s response. First, the issue of cost and paperwork. For farmers on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, the certifying organic body is Islands Organic Producers Association (IOPA). IOPA follows the COS, with five additional rule areas (IOPA 2017) as they believe the COS standards “are not rigorous enough” (IOPA 2018). The application process is lengthy, requiring a number of records and declarations, two inspections by an independent verification officer, which take a minimum of 15 months to as long as 36 months depending on a variety of variables (IOPA 2018). Another farmer, Theresa, also indicated that in her experience, the amount of required record keeping would have been too

great a challenge, when starting her farm, and would still be onerous in her operation today. The application fee comes to a total of \$500.43, a nominal fee overall, though this is on top of \$700 or more per year for certification. Given the margins of small-scale farming such a fee could be prohibitive or act as a deterrent from obtaining certification. Furthermore, the difficulty of obtaining organic products for one's farm is daunting. Mark, a poultry farmer, found it hard to source organic feed on the island. The cost, to his knowledge, was nearly double than non-organic feed, and that this feed may be substituted with up to 10 percent non-organic feed. He stated,

So, if we know that possibly it's not 100 percent organic, we would have to explain that to our customer. And that just doesn't sit well with us... it's like being nearly pregnant, it doesn't work that way, you know, so it's either organic or it's not.

– Mark, vegetable, poultry, and egg farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

Those who emphasize the benefits of organic certification may see the cost of certification as a relatively small one compared to the value of transforming the food system. Individual farmers may find the financial burden, time, paperwork, and other costs associated with being organic to be discouraging. These difficulties sometimes strain the social ties and trust that are established outside organic farmer networks and in direct marketing like farmers' markets.

Secondly, as mentioned by Bob, and by others I interviewed, the farmer's relationship with customers at the farmers' market is paramount. This echoes what is already well-documented in some farmers' market literature (for example Hinrichs 2000; Hinrichs et al. 2004; Kirwan 2004; Smithers et al. 2008). Farmers develop personalized relationships with their regulars who visit their stall every weekend at the farmers' market. Trust and transparency are key to this relationship, according to 60% of the farmers I interviewed. Unlike the supermarket

setting, a farmers' market facilitates the opportunity for customers to interact directly with the farmer to ask what methods and practices are used on their farm. Labels, certification, and standards are one of the key methods a globalized food supply chain can use to create trust at a distance. Gloria, a vegetable farmer, stressed that while the organic certification makes sense in instances where the customer cannot speak directly to the farmer, such as in a grocery store, the farmers' market offers a very different kind of relationship between farmers and consumers. As the farmers' market is the main source of income for the majority of the farmers I interviewed, and because regular customers are the backbone of farmers' success at farmers' markets, having an honest and truthful relationship with customers is imperative. The conversations and relationships between farmer and customer serve as a pseudo-contract that guarantees farmers' livelihoods and success as small-scale farmers. In this sense supermarket food, even that which is certified organic, and food purchased at farmers' markets are located within quite different ethical universes. However, as Gloria indicated, not every customer wants to have a conversation with farmers at the farmers' market:

the thing about customers is everyone's different, some people really want to talk to you and really want to learn about the farm and learn about the growing practices, and some people just want to buy their product from a farm, and they don't, and they're there just to get their groceries, swoop in, swoop out, and they don't really wanna [talk].

– Gloria, vegetable and flower farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

In such instances, food is constructed primarily as a commodity and not located in a network of relationships (McMahon 2002:2). In these cases, organic certification has the potential to benefit the farmer and help with marketing. It is difficult to know a customer's motive for purchasing from their farm stall if they do not have a conversation with the farmer, as Gloria continued:

I think those people who swoop in, they still care about where their food is coming from because they're obviously at the market, but maybe they've done some of their own research or who knows, maybe they're looking on our website, like we don't know that side of it if I don't actually talk to someone directly, I don't know why they're buying what they buy.

– Gloria, vegetable and flower farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

There could be a multitude of reasons for why a customer is shopping from a farmer at the farmers' market, that may or may not be readily obvious to the farmer. Research out of California shows consumer motivations for shopping at farmers' markets include valuing local food, valuing small scale farmers, wanting to support the local economy, wanting to know where their food comes from and who grew their food (Alkon 2008).

The theme of the farmer-consumer relationship was a consistent theme throughout many of the interviews, and the quality of this relationship appears to be the equivalent of having the organic certification. Farmers stated that they seldom have customers refusing to buy from them because they are not certified organic, explaining to me that such occurrences are minimal and have little effect on their business. For these farmers, if regulars and other customers are content with their assertions about their farming practices, they see no particular reason to certify. However, this assumes that farmers do not see certification as a potential political strategy for making social change. The literature suggests that many farmers did see certification as a political, and not simply a marketing issue, but that the conventionalization of organic standards by the involvement of public (national and international) and private (eg. corporate) organic regulatory standards depoliticized organics (Schneider 1989; DeLind 1993; Elder 2014). The tension among farmers at farmers' markets around certification, therefore, cannot be fully understood without, as Dorothy Smith advises, connecting the local to the extra-local (more than local) (Smith 2005:37, 42), and in this case global agri-food trade.

Theresa has not had her farm organically certified because of accessibility. She shared:

I think the thing about farmers' markets that's so amazing is that people who do want to get into farming it's not just farming, but you know, have their own little entrepreneurial business, you know and offer like a local product to the community, it's kind of this doorway into that in a really great way, and it's accessible and I think it should be accessible and, and the certified organic status isn't accessible to everyone, especially a new farmer, and I've been farming for 10 years and it seems like a massive obstacle. It would create a lot of difficulty for me and make like, make it a lot less enjoyable, just so much more record keeping and sourcing and, ohhh, it's really a lot of work, and then I'd have to increase the prices of everything and you know, that sort of thing so, that would also make it harder for me to get a start in my business if I was just starting out cause then my products would be less accessible to people.

– Theresa, herb farmer. Non-certified, ecological farmer.

First, Theresa speaks of accessibility as it refers to new farmers who are overwhelmed by the cost of obtaining or starting the application process to becoming certified, and the amount of record keeping and paperwork associated with organic certification, as have largely been discussed above. Secondly, Theresa alludes to accessibility for the customer which involves, specifically, the price point of a given product. As farmers' markets have been charged with being sites of reproducing class relations and for being inaccessible for low-income demographics (Allen 2004; Slocum 2006; 2007; Alkon 2008; Guthman 2008a; Guthman 2008b; Alkon & McCullen 2011; Guthman 2011; Schupp 2017), it is crucial that farmers and farmers' markets be conscientious of the cost of their products. On the one hand, yes, it is absolutely necessary that a farmer makes a living wage from their product. On the other hand, the function of the farmers' market in promoting and providing local food, and thereby, truly changing the food system will be ineffective if the affluent alone are able to afford its products. Thus, accessible pricing is often of importance to farmers so that they can cater to those of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. For small-scale farmers, profit margins are already so low that an additional \$700 or more a year is a considerable amount. This means the cost of organic

certification would be applied outwards to their consumers, which could potentially result in the farmer losing regular customers and other potential customers and limiting the number of affordable stalls. Some farmers acknowledged an awareness that many of their customers already “stretch” their budget to shop at the farmers’ market, and because of the farmer-consumer relationship discussed earlier, they do not wish to increase the costs of their products and disrespect the effort farmers’ market customers actively make. The issue of the certification of farmers at farmers’ markets brings up a whole range of issues around politics, ecology, and social justice that lie just below the surface. Again, it is difficult to have this conversation without acknowledging how the falsely cheap pricing of industrial food creates a multitude of challenges for alternative foodways.

Customers often raise the organic word as a way of asking a farmer about their growing practices:

They’ll [customers] ask me if it’s organic and I’ll tell them no, it’s not organic... and often I’ll, I can’t figure out what they’re getting at, so I’ll ask if they’re concerned about stuff being sprayed ‘yeah’ and that’s the main point for them, is has it been sprayed, and I say, ‘no it hasn’t been sprayed’ and after that most people are okay.

– Clarence, vegetable farmer. Non-certified farmer.

From my research, it appears the Ministry of Agriculture consultation report misunderstood the world it was attempting to regulate – at least on the surface. From farmers’ reports, consumer interest in organics is a proxy for concern about the use of pesticides and a desire for trust in their food. Of course, not spraying pesticides does not equate to organic growing practices, however the influence of political documentaries such as *The World According to Monsanto* (2008) or *GMO OMG* (2013) becomes obvious in the way it can shape the mentality and concerns of consumers. Such a statement is not to suggest that consumers do not seek education on the food system beyond such documentaries, rather that the attention to

particular aspects of the industrial food system become emphasized more so than others. It is more likely that a farmer be asked about pesticide use than about low-tilling practices, because less emphasis has been placed on the environmental devastation caused by over-tilling land. The real issues in the food system, as we know, go well beyond these issues, and the regulatory legislation does nothing to address structural power imbalances, along with ecological destruction and climate change associated with corporate concentration in an increasingly industrializing agri-food system. One might well ponder how it is that the regulatory authorities show little concern for how local agriculture and farmers' markets can help address these wider issues.

### **6.3 Concluding Thoughts**

It is not that farmers who grow organically without organic certification do not see the value in what organic means and what the certification is meant to stand for. Rather, farmers who are not certified organic but grow organically have a myriad of reasons not to become certified: burdensome bureaucracy, prohibitive costs, difficulties in sourcing 100% organic feed, loyalty to customers in providing accessibly priced goods, and importantly, the faith of regular customers in the quality of their product regardless of certification.

To give insight on the implications of the new organic regulations in BC, it would be worth investigating the benefits and consequences of the regulation for the following groups: small-scale farmers who are not organically certified, small-scale farmers who had been certified and continue to be certified, and for farmers who sought certification as a result of the regulation.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

### **7.1 What Did I Learn?**

In my introduction I talk about the idealism around local food movements and farmers' markets. I had very little exposure to farmers' markets ahead of my research and my observations at the markets I attended stacked up to these ideal portraits. Markets radiated a positive aura, showing conviviality between vendors and customers alike, and the pleasantries of consumption and entertainment. Dr. McMahon had told me that I would see the performance of farmers' markets during my fieldwork, but not the actual inner workings of farmers' markets themselves. She was right. I could only observe what Erving Goffman calls front stage during farmers' markets' operating hours. It was only possible to get an idea of farmers' markets' backstage before, after, and in preparation of farmers' markets, and within the interpersonal relationships of vendors, organizers, and sometimes customers, albeit still quite mystified.

Interviewing farmers removed the rose-colored glasses I had of farmers' markets, specifically in their organizational purpose. Where I had imagined farmers' markets would be steadfastly committed to alternative food politics and removing barriers that small-scale farmers encounter, I found differently. This shocked me given the critical role farmers' markets have in small-scale farmers' success. Each market seemed to vary in its commitment to supporting farmers, and subsequently to subvert the dominant corporate food regime. I cannot speak to the political ideologies of market managers as I did not interview them, a gaping limitation in my research. This is a site of inquiry to consider for the future.

I had also expected farmers to be more overtly political about the way they farm. Again, the idealism which first informed my understanding of the local food movement had me assume that farmers woke up every morning ready to subvert the dominant food system. Can you tell I am an idealist at heart? But farmers' lives are as complex as the rest of us, with bills to pay,

mouths to feed, relationships to tend to, things to worry about, and leisure to enjoy. Perhaps outside of the way farmers choose to farm, there is not often time to engage in the larger theoretical and practical work that alternative food entails. I suppose this is where I come in as an academic, to theorize and understand the actualities of alternative food.

My research challenged me to adjust my own perceptions about money-making. Was making money a bad thing? Are people who make money tricksters and crooks? Clearly not, as most of us require money in some capacity or another to live, and I would hate to think that most humans live with nefarious intentions (remember, I am an idealist). As Dr. McMahon pushed back on my impressions of money, I had to confront parts of my childhood. My familial class informed more of my sociological analysis than I had ever expected it to, which goes to show that a researchers' positionality matters, even when we think it does not. Part of who I am remains to feel threatened by the perception that local and ecological food is more expensive than conventional food, even when I know this to be largely untrue. The other part of me feels angry that such perceptions mystify the true consequences of conventional food – the low-wage, exploited, and typically migrant workers, who do not benefit from capitalist exploits; the ecological and cultural destruction it causes; the sixth or more of humanity who are food insecure and go hungry (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011); the health consequences Indigenous persons face when separated from their traditional food sources and practices<sup>44</sup>; and the host of other issues I do not have the space to dive into. Yet the small-scale farmer, charging enough so they can earn a living, is painted as upholding systemic issues they did not create, and as a money-schemer. I cannot help but think of *Cabaret's* (1972) song “Money Makes the World Go Round” as I write this reflection.

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<sup>44</sup> Lecture given at the Corporate Mapping Project Summer Institute, University of Victoria, 2017.

## **7.2 Limitations**

I remarked two limitations as I deepened my analysis of the farmer interviews. I did not interview market managers or non-farm vendors. Because I was determined to make this research about farmers, my narrow interest blindsided me from considering how market managers' and non-farm vendors' perspectives would further my analysis. This limitation is partially due to my novelty as a researcher but also because I assumed that farmers experiences with regulations would be coming from regulatory bodies such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Vancouver Island Health Authority. I did not recognize the importance of these perspectives until a few years after completing my interviews. This is because I had spent some time away from my studies during my pregnancy and then as a stay-at-home mom until I secured childcare for my daughter. Nevertheless, these limitations have helped me to outline what needs investigating at farmers' markets in my future research and also by other farmers' market researchers.

## **7.3 Methodological Reflections**

As mentioned in my methodology chapter, I was originally drawn to Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography. Ultimately my methodological practice did not follow institutional ethnography, but instead was inspired by it. However, had I stuck to this methodology, I may have pursued some of the following leads.

Market managers appeared to persuade the vision and direction of their farmers' markets, at least from the view of the farmers I interviewed. Interviewing market managers would have been prudent to understand if they wield the sort of power they are imagined or perceived to have, or whether the power dynamic is coming from other organizational entities. In tandem with interviewing market managers, I could have interviewed members from the board of directors to

get a better sense of how decisions are made at this level. Additionally, had I spent more time pressing to obtain each farmers' markets' bylaws and policies, here existed a potential portal into the ruling relations via textual analysis. Other avenues for textual analysis included the Market Manager Training Manual and the BCAFM Membership Policy.

After coding my interviews with farmers, follow-up interviews to probe on major themes could have led to a more fruitful analysis. To follow-up on points brought up by farmers would hold true to having the problematic be defined by the person or group in question, in this case, farmers. As part of following-up on interviews, I may have asked farmers if I could attend a market with them. Participant observation with farmers would facilitate a better sense of interactions between farmers, market managers, other vendors, and customers, and ultimately a better understanding of what farmers see as their problematics.

#### **7.4 Summary**

Throughout the course of this research, my goal was to underscore the experiences of farmers. Should farmers' markets continue to be the hallmark of alternative food networks, and to be truly for farmers, understanding how farmers' markets are working for and even against farmers is an important place to start. There are still many rocks left to be turned to fully capture how the organizations of farmers' markets can better support their farmers.

My research documented three themes affecting farmers. In chapter four, I discuss how that mainstream economics cannot fully account for farmers and the politics behind what they do. Understanding the more nuanced elements of economic behaviour as suggested in the works of Gibson-Graham might help us to better theorize farmers' market economies beyond monetary measures. To truly understand if farmers' markets are successful, we need to assess whether they

hold true to their ideological roots in food sovereignty, food justice, and ecological farming, as well as wholly supporting their farmers.

Chapter five complicates our current assessments of farmers' markets. As farmers' markets on Vancouver Island seem to be driven largely by non-farm vendors, are farmers' markets keeping with their roots? Many farmers felt their needs were becoming less significant to the organization of their farmers' market. As market organizations leaned into consumer culture, farmers' needs fell out of focus. For this reason, I intend to present my research findings to the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets. In this presentation, I will recommend that creating protections for farmers must be central to their organization, as well as re-positioning local food and farming centrally in their mandate.

Chapter six considers the regulation of the term "organic" across British Columbia and how farmers perceive organic certification. For the majority of the farmers in my research (87.5%), organic certification was not necessarily on their radar. Notably, organic certification would mean they must account for the cost of certification in the price of their products, which farmers felt unfair to their customers, especially those who stretch their budgets to shop there. Secondly, many felt the bureaucracy of certification to be overwhelming and cumbersome. Lastly, many farmers felt that organic certification did not measure up to their own growing standards, and in some ways, that certification would curb their autonomy. While this last chapter is less to do with farmers' market organizations themselves, it is obvious that organic certification and the regulation around the term organic has many implications for small-scale farmers selling at farmers' markets on Vancouver Island.

Going forward, I would like to keep within this line of research to better understand the nuances of farmers' market organizations and how this organizes farmers' lives. Potential areas

of research include interactions and relationships between farmers and non-farm vendors, farmers and market managers, as well as farmers with other farmers. Understanding these dynamics hold promise to capture the lived realities of selling at farmers' markets as small-scale farmers.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Research Questions

1. Demographics: age, education, percentage of income that comes from the farm?
2. Tell me a bit about yourself, your farm, and why you started farming.
3. How long have you been at “x” farmers’ market?
4. Why did you choose to sell at farmers’ markets? Why “x” farmers market?
5. Have you participated in other farmers’ markets than the one you are currently participating in?
6. Tell me about your experience with regulations and standards at the farmers’ market.  
Does your farmers’ market have rules and regulations? If yes, how do these regulations work, are they written down? Who gives the rules to you?
7. Do you have a copy of farmers’ market rules? (If they exist)
8. How about other farmers you know, have you heard them speak much to encountering regulations and standards at the farmers’ market?
9. How are the relations between farmers at farmers’ markets?
10. How would you feel if you were not selling at a farmers’ market?
11. Is insurance a problem for you?
12. If you were designing a farmers’ market, what would you do? What would you keep?  
What would you change?

## Appendix B: Consent Form/Participant Handout<sup>45</sup>

*A copy of this consent will be left with you*

### **The Regulations and Standards at Farmers Markets: The Farmer's Experience**

You are asked for permission to have audio recordings of the interview between yourself and interviewer Kora Liegh Glatt. Kora Liegh is a Masters Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. Dr. Martha McMahon, Kora Liegh's supervisor, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. *The purpose of the study is to learn how the work of small-scale farmers is shaped by the regulations and standards used at farmers markets on Vancouver Island. The empirical focus of the study is on small-scale farmers who participate in farmers markets on Vancouver Island, however the relevance of the research is wider and speaks to the potential for fostering a farmer-friendly regulatory environment at farmers markets. Information that research participants provide will be used for research purposes only and presented in terms of general patterns and trends. No individual, farm, or farmers market can be identified from research reports. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council is funding this research.*

Your involvement in this study is totally voluntary. If you agree, this involves having the interview recorded with an audio recorder. Your name will not be attached to the interview. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. It is hoped that this research will help bring greater recognition to the importance of small-scale farmers and the influence regulations and standards can have on farm work. The research can help inform farmers market organizers, Ministry and Municipal Authorities, policy makers, and planners to make better informed decisions when establishing or reviewing regulations and policies for farmers markets and food provisioning for sale. This information is also being gathered so that the general research literature on regulations and standards for small-scale farmers and farmers markets will better reflect the farmers' experience.

Your involvement is completely voluntary. If you do decide to agree to the audio recording of the interview, you may change your mind at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Only the principal investigator will have access to the audio recordings. Audio recordings will be kept under lock and key at my home, stored on an encrypted external hard drive. Consent forms will be stored separately from the recorded interviews.

The research findings from this study will be made available to farmers, farmers organizations, farmers markets, and Ministry and Municipal Authorities. The results will also be published in academic publications, including journals, presented at scholarly meetings, and made available to policy makers. If you have questions about this research project you may contact Kora Liegh Glatt at [redacted] or by email [redacted], or call Dr. McMahon at [redacted] (University of Victoria), [redacted] (home), or by email at [redacted]. You may also verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria [redacted].

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

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<sup>45</sup> Please note, all contact information has been removed from the appendices for privacy purposes. This information was included on participant handouts.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix C – Respondent Pseudonyms**

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>
Interview 1	I1 – Natasha
Interview 2	I1 – Bob
	I2 – Christine
Interview 3	I1 – Marjorie
	I2 – Carl
	I3 – Mark
Interview 4	I1 – Paul
Interview 5	I1 – Clarence
Interview 6	I1 – Terrance
Interview 7	I1 – Theresa
Interview 8	I1 – Mary
Interview 9	I1 – Gloria
Interview 10	I1 – Emily
	I2 – Jim
Interview 11	I1 – Jason
Interview 12	I1 – Donald

## Appendix D: HREB Certificate of Approval



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board  
 Administrative Services Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada  
 T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

### Certificate of Renewed Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: <b>Martha McMahon</b>	<b>ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 06-290</b>
UVic STATUS: <b>Faculty</b>	Minimal Risk Review - Board members
UVic DEPARTMENT: <b>SOCI</b>	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 25-Oct-06
	RENEWED ON: 16-Oct-19
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 24-Oct-20

PROJECT TITLE: **Local Sustainable Agriculture**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER Co-Investigator: Kora Leigh Glatt (UVic, Grad Student)

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: SSHRC Scholarship

**CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL**

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

**Modifications**  
 To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

**Renewals**  
 Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

**Project Closures**  
 When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

**Certification**

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.



Dr. Rachael Scarth  
 Associate Vice-President Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 16-Oct-19

06-290 McMahon, Martha