How do [or can] local farmers make it work?

by Robin Tunnicliffe
B.A., University of Guelph, 1997

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

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ABSTRACT

How do or can farmers make it work

Small, locally-marketing farms are garnering more attention with regard to their ability to supply their regions with food. Their economic viability is called into question because if they cannot sustain themselves financially, they cannot be relied upon as an alternative food system. This paper looks at economic viability and ask the question "how are farmers making it work?" Data is based on a 25 interviews with farmers on the Saanich Peninsula, British Columbia, Canada. The decision to continue running a farm year to year is complex. The answer to valuing these farms may come by looking at the productivity of the farms, their many services to the environment and to their communities, rather than just the financial picture. Farmers are finding ways to retain more of the value of their productivity from transactions with customers. Navigating the regulatory environment remains a challenge. The paper concludes with policy recommendations.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the farmers who invited me into their kitchens and onto their farms. They opened their books and recounted their challenges with a sincere desire to further the understanding of small farms and their economic reality. I would like to thank Dr, Alison Eagle for all her help and encouragement. It was a real pleasure working with her on this project. Thankyou to Catherine Etmanski for her proof reading and suggestions. I would like to thank all my supervisory committee for their support and dedication, but especially Ken Hatt and Martha McMahon, who went above and beyond. Finally, I would like to thank my parents who kindled in me the spark for inquiry and life-long learning.

INTRODUCTION

Background

As a farm apprentice in the late 1990s, I received an education that was equal parts politics, social justice and organic farming techniques. By day I would work alongside the farmer, learning about proper cultivation techniques, soil fertility and plant varieties. By night I would read the local farmer newsletters, and books by agrarian writers like Wendell Berry, and Mansanobu Fukuoka. Conversations at meal times, and on the end of a hoe exposed me to ideas I had not heard before. The history, the social relations and the political landscape of agriculture, and the tensions within it provided many months of discussion. I took every opportunity to attend conferences locally as well as nationally and internationally with the aim of engaging farmers in discussion and learning more about their social positioning as well as their farming operations.

A pivotal moment in my appreciation of small farm/industrial farm debate was listening to a speaker at the first Food Secure Canada conference in Winnipeg in 2003. The topic was the "Human Right to Food" and the speaker elaborated on how our government had signed on to a UN Rights Declaration ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, has the right to food[1]. This idea resonated with me because I believed it was the fair thing to do. At the same time I wondered from where should this food come? The organic movement, of which I was a part, told me that corporate food oligarchies played a large role in environmental destruction and exploitation. Was it the right thing to do to buy food cheaply for the poor even if it meant supporting the very institutions that help

[1] Rome Declaration, World Food Summit, 1996

create and maintain global poverty? Could small organic farms have a role to play in feeding the populations within their regions and thus the world?

If farmers cannot feed the people who live around them, then we have no choice but to work with the global food system. It is my hypothesis that local, small and direct-marketing farms can feed surrounding populations. However, before embracing this type of agriculture as the definitive answer to the ailments in our food system, it is important to closely examine the tensions.

My apprenticeship and the subsequent 12 years of running my own farm have been a time of developing my own analysis of the social and political landscape that underlies food and farming. I was drawn to studying food policy and small farm viability to help me make sense of my situation as a small-scale farmer situated in the global food system. I wanted to have answers for my customers at the farmers markets. One question in particular gets asked a lot: "Why is your produce so expensive?" I never have a satisfactory answer.

The question raises some issues that will be addressed in the rest of this thesis. I think about my leased one-acre farm with my second-hand tools, my very modest income, simple lifestyle, and direct-to-customer local marketing. Then I compare this to large-scale industrial farms that I have toured at conferences: their vast fleets of tractors, harvesters, washing, packing and refrigerated transportation equipment; the great distance between these farmers and their customers, and then the many layers of middlemen who handle the food from farm to plate. Answering my customers' question, I will argue, is a matter of uncovering the false economics at play: government

subsidies, vertically integrated companies that produce food as a by-product of their fertilizer and machinery sales, and farmers who are carrying large debt loads. Clearly there is no simple answer about why the food from my farm costs more.

If the economics of large scale agriculture are distorted, what then are the real economics behind small farms? Through research with farmers and a review of the literature, I wanted to analyze my own and other local Victoria region farmers' experiences, in order to better understand small farm viability. Although my farm is locally focused, and I'm not trading in world markets, the global context of food is always present as a reference point. Agribusiness has set a standard to which all other farms are measured. Real economics are hard to measure on the local farm front, because farmers are often so apologetic about the cost of their food, in comparison to the cheap food at the grocery store, that they buffer the real cost with unpaid hours, and untracked expenses. There is a dominant attitude toward farmers that because they enjoy their work, the low wage is adequate compensation. There is also the question of efficiency in smaller operations, that has been thoroughly challenged[2], but the attitude remains that small farms operate for values other than serious food production. They are not truly necessary and therefore not as valuable. The dominant attitude continues to present industrial agriculture as the only viable system for feeding our population; the environmental damage and exploitation of people and animals is a necessary cost of doing business. It requires some critical thinking to evaluate the social and environmental services delivered by small farms, over the long term, and to value

[2] see Darren Qualminen, NFU, 2005; Olivier de Schutter, 2011

resilient food systems. I argue that it is time to question whether industrial agriculture is really as efficient as it is perceived to be.

Research Question

Bio-regional, or local food systems are being promoted as a solution to the problems with our current food system[3]. My research question, "How do [or can] local farmers make it work?" asks what is happening in local food producing businesses. Are they economically viable? and if so, what are they doing differently than farms that aren't able to make ends meet. The question also addresses the regulatory environment within which the farms operate. Is regulation helping or hindering farmers' ability to make their businesses work?

The question: what exactly is "viable"? surfaced more than once. Definitions vary, but they centre around the idea of being able to continue, being feasible, workable, or successful. There is also the consideration of adequate income for the operator. What is adequate income? and what does it mean if farming cannot generate adequate income? Finally, how to define "making it work?"

The scenarios I encountered were so varied that it became apparent that it was a futile exercise to set parameters. An example is a corn farmer who is so embedded in the community as a farmhand that he has access to land and equipment for free. He makes

[3] A food system is comprised of many commercial and non-commercial endeavours from food production, transportation, handling, preparation, consumption, elimination and finally to re-incorporation with nature (Dahlberg 1993).

$18,000 a year from farming. His labour is 2 passes over 20 acres with machinery, and marketing his products. Is this viable when you think about his labour being less than 200 hours a year? Definitely, but when you account for all the neighbourly favours he does to secure his access to means of production? Maybe? But does his operation work? Yes, and he has plans for expansion in the future. Another example is a young family who rent a rural property with acreage. Their focus is having lots of time with their young children, and they do odd jobs off the property to pay some bills. However, just over half of their income comes from farming. They grow fresh produce and eggs that they sell locally. Per unit of time spent on this operation, the return is not significant, but the alternative of the parents getting paid work and putting their three children into daycare may actually yield less overall net income. Is their operation viable? Maybe? but is it working? Yes, and when the children reach school age, the parents have plans to devote more time to their operation. Numbers and definitions are valuable guidelines, but put into context, they can have an entirely different meaning.

Coming up with a research question, and importantly, finding an empirical framework for data analysis, was a learning process. I started off studying 'triple bottom line'-type analysis. I felt that including social and environmental accounting would help quantify the spectrum of activities that were happening on small farms. In the end, I felt it was too simplistic a concept to capture the depth and breadth of small farm services. Moreover, it was like comparing apples and oranges, and it felt bizarre to assign monetary value to social and environmental services. After wrestling with other

conventional value frameworks, I decided to embrace the original project title[4] that was arrived at intuitively, "How do [or can] local farmers make it work". If the farmers self-identify as successful, and their farm is continuing to operate year to year, then it is working. I was initially disappointed that I couldn't find a framework that would say more, in terms of quantitative data, but in the end I found that this type of analysis yielded some very robust qualitative data.

Farming is a function of many values along with economic viability. The decision to continue a farming operation year to year is complex. Economic theory is based on the assumption that people always behave in an economically rational manner. I feel that economic self-interest is only one of many motivators that influenced the decisions that farmers made in this study. Farmers' criteria for decision-making may be a balance between money and what is best for their families, their values and traditions and their convictions about the food system. There is a dedication to maintaining the enterprise of farming that may be a unique feature of agriculture. Removing non-economic values from the overall equation of a farm is not a useful exercise in evaluating the business. It can result in the farmers appearing to be irrational, but upon closer examination, many of the farm operations are a carefully calculated mix of financial and non-monetary benefits that "work" for the farmer.

There is a judgment about farmers who have income "purely" generated from farming activities, rather than having "off farm" income. For some purposes it may be useful to

[4] See beginning of methods chapter for background on collaborating with Alison Eagle and Kees Van Kooten in Economics.

determine whether farm businesses are entirely "stand alone." For my purposes, this is not necessary. Historically, even when local farming was the sole means for providing food, farmers typically worked off the farm for extra money. Paradoxically, career farming is an advent of the industrial age (peasants typically had multiple occupations). Does having off-farm household income indicate that the farming is less valuable? The food system is so distorted by industrial agriculture subsidies and vertically integrated companies[5] that in some sectors, at some times, generating income from small farming activities is impossible. I argue that the distortions are in the world market and not in the local market place. Currently in BC, 54% of farmers have off-farm income, compared to 48% that is the national average (Statistics Canada, 2006). Some of the farmers we interviewed understand (or are gambling) that in the long term, the services that they are currently providing will be valuable. The returns for their work may not be realized until the next generation. By its nature, agriculture is an inter-generational project. "Making it work" is an expression of these values in a business context.

Based on a review of the literature and my familiarity with the subject matter, I hypothesized that small farms that were selling their own products directly into local markets were faring better economically than their medium and larger scale counterparts. For this reason I looked at the research question, "How do [or can] local farmers make it work?" from three distinct angles, with an eye for farm viability and the feasibility of a local food system. First relates to location. What is the value and the

[5] Some vertically integrated companies will take a loss on the food production side of the business because the farm products create a market for their other divisions, for example fertilizer sales, trucking, processing and retail

scope of a (re)localized food system, and is it a worthwhile endeavour? What can be gained by having farmers and consumers in closer proximity? Second relates to scale: are small-scale farmers relevant in a marketplace dominated by multinational food conglomerates? What difference does scale make in terms of earning potential, energy expenditures, and the provision of social and environmental services? Third relates to marketing: can local and small-scale farmers extract a living from direct sales to customers? Is direct marketing an appropriate model for local, small-scale production? These three elements of farm viability (local, scale, and direct marketing) are examined in detail in the rest of the thesis.

Overview

This thesis begins with a review of the literature on small-scale sustainable agriculture in Canada, the US and the U.K. I organize this review around the themes of local, scale, and direct-marketing, because these are dominant and persistent themes in the literature and they also correspond with the empirical findings. I then proceed to describe my research project, including the methodology, in detail. The empirical findings for this thesis come from structured interviews with 25 local farmers. I group research participants by farm type and then compare and contrast their farming strategies, their marketing strategies, dimensions of their social, economic and ecological viability and their relationship to the regulatory environment.

To further contextualize the data analysis, I return to the themes from the literature review to link theory to practice. The farmers I interviewed had a lot of knowledge and analysis of their situation that I share directly with the reader through quotes and anecdotes. I analyze the data in a chapter on farm viability, and then conclude by offering my answers to the questions raised in the introduction. The thesis ends with some policy recommendations distilled from this research project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review will cover the main issues pertaining to small-scale agriculture in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. This will provide the theoretical and research context for examining the concrete issue of the viability of farming in the peri-urban area from which my research participants were drawn, on the Saanich Peninsula of Southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. In order to closely examine the salient attributes of this peri-urban agriculture, I pay particular attention to three themes which the literature indicates are central to strategies for economic viability among many small and/or ecologically oriented farms: local, small, direct marketing. There is some overlap between the three subheadings because these features are characteristic of farms serving alternative food systems, however, they are each worth examining in detail.

There is a popular trend in Canada and the US, and also in the UK toward the re-localization of food systems with an interest in sustainable production methods (Hines 1996; Hinrichs 2000; Sage 2002; Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Jaroz 2008). This trend, the same literature suggests, is part of a wider alternative food movement. Hinrichs (2000) identifies three characteristics of farms that are involved in the alternative food movement: small, local and direct marketing. The following literature review will focus in these three areas. The irony was not lost on me that these three salient features of agriculture that are working for farmers are the exact opposite of the main thrust of

national and international Canadian agriculture policy over the past 20 years.

> To remain competitive, farmers must evolve and adopt new, more efficient production methods. . . . farmers must strive to compete in a global marketplace, they must continually look for new efficiencies in the form of economies of scale, new technology, and vertically-integrated operations. (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food 2000)

Many farms in Canada are caught up in what the National Farmers Union ([NFU] 2005; NFU 2008) calls a debt crisis. But not all farmers are caught in that crisis (Ross 2005), and many small farmers in particular avoid debt as a way of retaining control over their farm operations and farming practices. As we will see, following their own sense of the market, their values and their traditions, farmers in my study were approaching their businesses in unconventional ways. The following literature review reveals some of the complexities.

Local

Local food has been the subject of much media and scholarly attention. The reported benefits of eating local range from boosting the local economy (Allen 1999; DeLind and Bingen 2008; Stobbe 2008), to more environmentally friendly production (Allen 1999; Ross 2005; Clarke et al. 2008) and distribution, and to farmland preservation (Libby and Sharp 2003; Mariola 2005; Frye 2007). Since agricultural production is a base for so many industries, it has been rated with a local multiplier effect of 2.00 (New Economics Foundation 2002:22). This means that for every dollar earned by local farmers, two dollars are infused back into the local economy assuming the farmers use local labour

and supplies. The term "local" itself is vague and contested but has become an important symbolic boundary for food marketing. Food researchers have put forth several ways to think about local: bureaucratic boundaries, foodsheds, and bio-social connections which will be described below.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) definition of what constitutes 'local' is one solution to the logistical problem of defining local food. This definition simplifies local food as originating within 50 km from the government unit within which it is sold (see appendix A). The political and analytical consequences of setting an arbitrary boundary like this are complex (Hinrichs 2003). Farms in closer urban proximity are unfairly privileged because they can use the local label in their marketing. This label can generate more income for the farmer because its value is recognized in certain markets. The irony of the situation is that smaller urban farmers may make less of an impact on overall food security than larger geographically close farms that cannot meet the CFIA's labeling criteria but still meet the meaning of local within the bioregion.

The concept of foodsheds represents another way to think about local food systems. "Foodsheds are the agricultural equivalent of watersheds: the agro-ecological footprint necessary to feed a community or a region" (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson and Stevenson 1996:12). It puts an emphasis on connections, and components. The visual association with water is also helpful for understanding food flow. A foodshed is comprised of diversity of tributaries, each with their important contribution to the whole. There are flood seasons and dry seasons; it is imperfect and changing. This description helps

ground food provisioning in a biological reality (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson and Stevenson 1996). There is room to contemplate natural systems and other life forms from within this concept. Unlike with the CFIA definition, there is no need to split hairs about food that comes from 51 km away.

McMichael (2000) sees the recognition of foodsheds and localized food systems as a challenge to what he calls the global corporate food regime. The concept of a food regime comes from the work of Harriet Friedmann (1993) and others[6] who describe the stages of globalization and re-organization of agriculture. Hendrikson and Heffernan (2002) explain how power in this global regime comes from the ability to overcome the spatial distances between consumers and producers. Technology in production, refrigeration and transport of food has given corporations the ability to centralize operations, thereby decoupling food from place in an unprecedented way. Corporations that can master the logistics of securing and delivering food before it spoils have displaced traditional food systems and have the potential to amass a large share of the market. A few powerful actors are able to benefit the current structuring of the food system (ETC Group 2008). When smaller actors are already spatially positioned near the consumers, they can compete for market share but they are at a disadvantage because they have not got power in the marketplace as do the bigger corporations (McMichael 2003). However, local producers can and do exploit other advantages, like building relationships, responding to local preferences and creating a movement to support them.

[6] see Special Issue on Food Regimes, Ag and Human Values, 2009 26:309-319)

These connections have the ability to position local products favourably in the marketplace.

As large food conglomerates have come to dominate the food system, they have instituted what Lee and Marsden (2009) call “retailer-led food quality protocols” which are a form of private sector governance in order to retain consumer confidence despite frequent food recalls. These corporate regulatory regimes are in many ways ahead of the state in terms of keeping tabs on food handling and safety standards of products coming across the border. These standards have become normative for food handling in industry but regulators have forgotten they were only ever necessary for massive, centralized production where the food chain is long and convoluted. These food safety standards are now a major barrier for local farmers trying to access markets because they are being held to the industrial standard. A good example is the requirement that a certified inspector be present during all slaughtering and processing operations, regardless of whether production involves 50 or 50,000 animals. The whole local meat production system is seriously hindered under this regulatory regime. There is reason to believe that fruit and vegetables will soon be held to a similar industrial standard (Hughes, 2010).

Born and Purcell (2006) caution against the easy acceptance of the local as a solution to a range of problems to do with food and agriculture. There has been a lot of messaging in the media recently promoting local as always a better alternative. The authors coined the term “the local trap” to warn against assuming anything inherently good or bad about

scale or locality. Often the argument toward eating locally produced food centres on a belief that food from elsewhere is necessarily bad, and food from here is always the better choice. This assumption is dubious. For example, there is genetically modified corn grown on Vancouver Island, as well as many battery hen operations. These production practices are aligned with the most concerning aspects of industrial agriculture, yet they are local. While Born and Purcell are right, in practice it is also the case that short food supply chains (SFSC) and alternative food networks (AFN) can provide consumers with the opportunity to visit a farm, to know the farmer and to decide for themselves what standards of food production are consistent with their values (Hendrikson and Heffernan 2002; Ross 2005). In this way, food production that happens close-by can have radical transformative power because of the relationships that develop around food. This transparency is at the heart of "civic agriculture," a concept that links local food production with democratic participation (Lyson 2007; Dupuis and Gillon 2008). It is opportunity for communities to work together to reconstruct a food system that is under greater democratic control and more consistent with the values and interests of local communities in their different contexts. When I consider the problems with industrial agriculture: pollution, inhumane treatment of workers and animals, and high energy use, I can see an opportunity for transformation through civic participation or at least having farms in the centre of the community so that the people can participate in what they would like to see happen in their food system. Thus although simply the label, local, is no indication that the food is more or less sustainable, socially just or safe than any other product on the shelf (Allen 1999), the development of new social and ecological relations around food may well help produce food that is safer and better, not

just locally but globally. That is, as part of networks of movements of resistance and opposition (Desmarais, Wiebe and Wittman 2010), local food movements may well become part of transformative social movement in food and farming.

When examined critically, the local-global oppositional stance embedded in the turn to the local can be looked at as a spectrum of relationships, not a reification of geography. Many local farms depend on the global market for supplies, and components of their production (Hinrichs 2003; Jaroz 2008). Local farms can create or take advantage of more lucrative niche markets because the global system currently supplies many staples at low cost, thus creating a mass market from which local farmers can differentiate themselves. It is important to remember that 'local' can have a constructed meaning that may be different from what concerned consumers may assume. "Local" beef that is sold in Alberta, may have spent most of its life in the Mid Western United States, and been fed a diet that included Argentinian soy. Local wines may contain mostly foreign grapes (Gismondi 2009). Thus unreflexive localism can threaten the very virtues and values that drive the movement (Dupuis and Goodman 2002). Indeed, without contact with producers, local products become vulnerable to being co-opted by superficially similar products (Guthman 2004), as when Walmart goes local.

Are connections between consumers and producers then, the key to ensuring that localized food systems perform their multiplicity of functions for the benefit of the natural and social world? Sage argues that "social embeddedness (between producers and consumers) works to mediate self-interest rather than a concern for the wider

common good" (2002:47) By this, he means that by associating a set of values with a product, because of its connection to the producer, a consumer looks beyond the simple price tag and becomes able to buy into the values associated with that product. For example, an Italian community might rally behind an Italian producer and choose her products over others just because of her ethnic origin. Similarly, an environmental group might assign a label to farmers' products because the farmers are actively fostering a local site of interest. These are attributes that have nothing to do with food, yet they are selection criteria in the marketplace. Location, in this instance is crucial for the construction of the moral economy, but this moral economy isn't necessarily globally ethical. At the same time, Smith and Craig (2006) conclude that local eating has a grounding and connecting influence, that through the food, people develop respect and reverence for the place, which results in greater awareness of sustainability, land stewardship and social relations.

When considering relations around local food, it is important to consider who is excluded and who benefits from the promotion of local eating. 'Defensive localism' is an expression of local patriotism or civic pride. It is a buying pattern that has been historically documented in food systems (Hinrichs 2003; Winter 2003). Some scholars of alternative food networks have made connection between social embeddedness and ecological concern (Winter 2003). Their assumptions about local purchasing do not fully capture the complex and strongly rooted cultural connection that people make with food. Winter found that local buying decisions are more likely motivated by a desire to protect and privilege the regional economy, or to appease a personal sympathy with the plight of

farmers rather than for any particular quality of the food.

Local relations can both reflect and reproduce social stratification. Shoppers at farmers markets and members of community-supported agriculture farms (CSA) tend to be white, upper middle-class consumers (Dupuis and Goodman 2002). Local and organic qualities are values-based attributes that cost more, and in some cases are less convenient to access. Farmers markets are only held at certain times, and some CSA farms require a car to pick up produce. Fresh farm products require skill and time to prepare. All of these attributes make local food less accessible to people of all income levels (Ross 2005). In order to try and address this stratification in the US, food stamps, redeemable for local products at farmers markets in low-income areas, are starting to make local food more accessible. British Columbia's Ministry of Health trialed a similar program in 2009. These incentives, coupled with cooking lessons, and access to community kitchens, are helping people with lower incomes to bring down their food costs because cooking with local whole foods can be cheaper and more nutritious than buying pre-packaged meals (Pothukuchi 2005).

Another interesting angle to consider is who decides what local food to privilege? For instance, First Nations on Vancouver Island had been actively farming camus lilies and other native cultivars long before European contact (Beckwith 2002). They had also been altering select coastlines to augment clam production (Harper 2005). Both these important food sources have been displaced by European-type agricultural activity; firstly by the clearing of meadows for European-style agriculture and secondly by the

nitrogenous and silty run-off from farm field ditches that clouds the ocean water and suffocates bi-valves like clams and scallops. When activists are fighting to save farmland, are they working against this former food system? Initiatives like 'Feasting for Change'[7] are working to build awareness and to promote First Nations food systems by building connections to culture and land through food (Devereaux 2008).

The "invention of tradition" (Hinrichs 2003:35) is a subversive move toward privileging the local. This can involve researching the food bounty that might have once been available to early indigenous people and settlers during celebrations, and then linking modern meal planning to this knowledge, which is possibly accurate but currently unfamiliar to the eaters. The romanticism associated with traditional agriculture is a powerful tool to bring awareness to the trend of globalization. The "turn to quality" (Sage 2002) may involve re-kindling traditions, but "tradition" may also be made up of conjured imaginings of how things were that pre-date our memory. Sonnino (2005) relates a story about (re)building a saffron industry based on archeological evidence that there was once a thriving trade in a region of Italy. Reinventing local traditions may be a meaningful process but their authenticity must be scrutinized to in order to determine whose interests are served. This process could equally be used to subversively reinforce or contest power.

[7] Feasting for Change is a movement to celebrate traditional food systems on Vancouver Island. Feasts showcase local food and create occasions to talk about indigenous health, traditional food and community solutions for improving quality of life.

To sum up, while there is great potential for social and environmental benefits from local food, there is nothing inherent about the location of food production that makes this true. Embedded relationships between consumers and producers may make for greater transparency in food systems, but it is important to be reflective about the broader effects of local food systems promotion. While local food relations may present opportunities, they are not immune from the existing relations of stratification, marginalization and appropriation found in any community or sub-region.

Scale

The turn to small farms as a strategy for food security is a notable paradigm shift. Small farms are getting more recognition for their productive potential, their environmental and social services, and their role as a rural economic engine. While international trade is dominated by agri-business, small farms are gaining market share by operating within alternative food networks. Agri-business was once revered for its ability to provide cheap and abundant food. Community food activists are now drawing attention to the cost associated with food from the dominant system, namely poor nutritional value, and environmental destruction. This section explores small farms in more detail.

Definitions of small farming are necessarily arbitrary. There is no single agreed on definition in Canada. Definitions vary and they use both dollars and acres as criteria. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a small farm as having agricultural sales less than $50,000 (USDA Economic Rural Service 2009), Statistics Canada classifies small farms with sales under $40,000. Other definitions attempt to

capture physical size, diversity and management style. I believe that scale is relative to crop type as well as to geography, so that any definition of farm size will fall short in relation to different bioregions. For example, on southern Vancouver Island where the topology limits the size of land parcels, a 50-acre vegetable operation could be called a large farm. In southern Saskatchewan, a 250-acre grain farm may be considered small in relation to the surrounding farms. A key attribute of a small farm by most definitions is that it is run by a sole proprietor, a family, or a partnership, rather than by a corporate entity.

Since Amartya Sen's work on the inverse relationship between farm size and productivity in India (1962), scholars have been closely examining these findings to understand the counter-intuitive logic behind this relationship. How can small be more efficient? Assunço and Braido (2007) initially suggested that the higher per acre productivity of small farms had more to do with the exploitation of cheaper family labour than any inherent qualities of the farm itself. However, after thorough investigation of household-specific effects, the authors had to conclude that it is not extra labour but "the content of the inverse relationship [that] is related to unobserved characteristics of the plot rather than the household" (2007:215). It is the style of farming that makes the difference. Small farmers may be more motivated to make the best use of their limited land. Rosset (2000) claims small farms in northern and southern contexts are 10 to 1000 times more productive than large-scale farms because they aren't limited by machinery and the requirements of a single crop. In other words, a small farmer can be more flexible with adapting crops and cultivation methods to best

suit the soil properties and land topography. Alteri (1999) has calculated the productivity of small-scale farmers practicing agro-ecological methods at 1:11 input to output of calories, whereas industrial agriculture spends 27 calories to produce one calorie of food.

Between 1961 and 2001, the number of farms in Canada declined from approximately 500,000 to 250,000 (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada [AAFC] 2006) while the total land in production in Canada, 167 million acres, remained stable(Statistics Canada 2006). These numbers are a testament to the consolidation in the agriculture sector, with land changing hands from small family operations to larger farms and corporately-managed entities. At the same time, there was an increase in three categories of farms, as defined by AAFC: in 'Low-income' farms with gross receipts less than $250,000, in 'Lifestyle' and in 'Retirement' categories (I will argue later that these are problematic ways of categorizing small scale farms). The total number of farms on the Saanich peninsula, as well as the total area farmed in this region has seen a slight increase over the past 10 years (Statistics Canada 2006)[8]. However, 1/3 of these farms since 1996 are reporting income for the first time. This means that we are losing existing farms, and we are gaining new small farms, which may or may not survive. (Statistics Canada, 2006). Coteleer, Stobbe and VanKooten (2008) attribute this increase in farming activity on the Saanich peninsula largely to favourable tax rates on agricultural land. The authors go on to argue that since the threshold for farm tax classification is set deliberately low to

[8] The partitioning of the Saanich peninsula into census divisions and census consolidated divisions from which the data has been gathered makes direct comparison difficult but the numbers indicate an overall increase.

encourage agricultural activity, rural estate owners actively seek out land in the agricultural reserve to take advantage of the lower tax rate.

Small farms are diversifying the agricultural economy. Data from the 2001 census states that 67% of census farms reporting alternative commodities (for example: garlic, currants, and ostriches) were small farms. Their small scale and flexibility gives them an advantage in developing commodities for specialized or newly emerging markets (Statistics Canada 2006). Small farms also contribute to the surrounding regional economy because their operations can require more labour than their larger counterparts, especially the organic farms (Maynard 2005).

Chiappe and Flores (1998) see the nature of small, ecologically focused farms as highly gendered. Low-capital operations using simple technology with reliance on community, operating in harmony with nature can be juxtaposed to the more masculine agri-business corporate models with a high level of capital investment, specialized equipment and international export. Tieman (2004) continues the gender theme with her analysis on what she calls "indigenous markets", traditional rural markets where locals shop for vegetables. The small farms that supply these markets have offerings that are reminiscent of the backyard garden where food was free for the taking (because nobody valued the labour of the grandmother or mother who tended the family plot). "Because these goods are like those that are not part of the mass production and distribution economy, they are perceived as having less market value" (Tieman 2004:48). Indigenous markets are compared with 'experience' markets, also gendered spaces

where alternative food production (ecological values, social justice and traditional farming culture) is highly valued by educated urban consumers, and farmers receive high prices for specialty and unusual fruits and vegetables of the highest quality.

Small farms have been getting more recognition for their many services to humanity and the planet. Some estimates gauge as much as 85% of the world's food is produced on small farms (Van der Plough 2008). The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report, an intergovernmental panel with representatives from 58 countries recognized the contributions of small-scale producers for food, fibre and medicine production as well as their social and environmental services. A key recommendation from the report states: "Increasing the value captured by small-scale farmers in global, regional and local markets chains is fundamental to meeting development and sustainability goals" (IAASTD 2008:19).

There are competing views toward small farmers, even within the same organizations. The World Trade Organization's Agreement on Agriculture, which governs world trade in agriculture, has regulated the distortion of markets in international trade, putting small farmers at a disadvantage and favouring highly subsidized agri-business. Through dumping (off-loading excess production at well below cost, usually in developing countries) appropriation and geo-political manoeuvers like food-aid, agri-business has been permitted to artificially cheapen food, and undermine community food systems. In the mid 1990s, 80 percent of farm subsidies in the OECD countries were allotted to the

largest 20 percent of corporate farms (McMichael 2004). At the same time between 1996 and 1999, US farm income declined by almost 50 percent (Gorelick in McMichael 2000). That is, corporate farms were getting an increased portion of the returns to agriculture, whether from direct and indirect subsidies or farm product sales. With the combination of these two factors, small farmers, like those I interviewed, either had to change what they were doing, or face extinction.

A key survival strategy of small farms is to participate in alternative food networks (Allen et al 2003). This movement represents an effort to respatialize and resocialize food production (Jaroz 2008) Small farms can, for the most part, function independently from the agro-industrial complex, and rely instead on the surrounding community. For example, small farms can be more diverse in their approach to farming because they can grow their own seed, make their own fertility through compost and do their own distribution with a community network and a farm truck. They can readily adapt to local conditions and take advantage of local surpluses and opportunities. They can buy and sell much of what they need through the local economy. For this reason, small farms can be more resilient, more adaptable, and more relevant to a local setting (ETC group 2008). Perhaps of great relevance at the moment, they can become less dependent on oil and so lessen price fluctuations and the volatility of the market place. Large farms too can provide benefits to surrounding communities through employment, but they most likely require external support from agri-business for farm inputs, and for marketing their products, hence the net economic flow is not necessarily a local gain.

The Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) has made a significant shift toward supporting small farms in order to create and recognize the spatially closer link between farmers and consumers (Pothukchi 2005). Food security, as newly defined by the CFSC, calls for a "community responsive food system" (CFSC 2009) that addresses a broad range of problems affecting how and what food flows into communities. Small farms are a crucial component for how CFSC sees making change in our food system. This is an entirely different approach to food security since the term was coined in 1974 at the World Food Summit. The original thrust behind the term "food security" came from a partnership between governments and industry with the aim of producing large quantities of cheap food.

The FAO has recorded over 200 definitions of food security since 1974. Their most recent working definition is as follows:

> "Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO 2001).

This definition has evolved from its original focus on absolute food availability for national consumption to include social criteria like access and food preferences. The term food security remains "agnostic about the production regime, about the social and economic conditions under which food ends up on the table." (Patel 2007:90). The language of food security establishes passive food relations, the focus remains on access to supply rather than agency to be involved in ensuring food supply. For the IAASTD and the CFSC to promote the role of small farms in securing food supply is an important paradigm shift.

In summary, small farms are getting more recognition for their productive potential, their environmental and social services, and their role as a rural economic engine. While international trade is dominated by agri-business, small farms are flexible enough to gain market share by operating within alternative food networks. Agri-business was once revered for its ability to provide cheap and abundant food. Community food activists are now drawing attention to the cost associated with food from the dominant system, namely poor nutritional value, and environmental destruction. Turning to small farms as a source of food security is a notable paradigm shift.

Direct Marketing

While there is no formal definition of direct farm marketing, and there is a diversity of approaches, several elements characterize this form of commerce between farmers and customers. There is a focus on establishing and building a relationship between the farmer and the customer, an exchange of knowledge and a sense of place. (McKinnon 2006; Sonntag 2008) Farmers set their own prices for their products based on the cost of production (Roth 1999; Hendrikson and Heffernan 2002; Heasman and Lang 2006). This may or may not be a cooperative process with customers. There is an emphasis on marketing with little packaging, with an emphasis on the use of natural, or recycled materials (Eisses 2003).

The increase in popularity of organic and local foods has encouraged a 'repeasantization' of the urban fringe (Dupuis 2005). While some people are drawn in

for the attributes of the food itself, others are drawn by theories like Civic Agriculture in which food acts as a catalyst for bringing community together (Ross 2005; Lyson 2007). Small farms that are situated close to urban areas are ideally suited to direct farm marketing. Many say this is the only viable marketing strategy for small farm survival, because it allows the farmers to circumvent the world market and to engage consumers with different conventions and constructions of value (Dupuis 2005; Ross, 2005; Eaton, 2008; Jaroz 2008; Warner 2008).

Shortly after World War II, farmers received approximately 40 cents for every dollar spent on food. In 2003, they received less than 5 cents (NFU 2003). The largest farms can sustain these margins because they benefit from economies of scale and from government subsidies, but the medium and small farms cannot operate within these margins (Lang and Heasman 2006). The mainstream food system is dominated by large corporations with set standards in regard to volume, timing and packaging requirements; small farms are, by default, excluded from supermarket chains and institutions because they do not have the resources to operate within these parameters (Goodman and Goodman 2008). As retailing, wholesaling and production become increasingly integrated, opportunities for participation in this system are further reduced (Burch and Lawrence 2005).

Participation in the global food system requires capital, business skills, certification with health authorities and familiarity with wholesaling protocol. Direct farm marketing, especially at farmers' markets, can act as an incubator for all of these requirements

(Hinrichs and Lyson 2007). Producers can start slowly learning about their sector through contact with consumers; they can experiment with scale and timing. Rather than requiring extensive capital and land, in a smaller system, farmers can better utilize their family's labour and can intensively use their land (Lyson 2007). They can rely on their own practical knowledge, and knowledge from their neighbours rather than having to seek out expert consultants with high fees (Chiappe and Flores 1998).

Direct farm marketing is generally scale-limiting[9] because it demands a higher transaction cost from the farmer per unit of goods sold (Jaroz 2008). He or she must facilitate an exchange, whether it be at a farmers' market, a farm gate, a CSA or though direct sales to chefs or grocery store managers (Allen et al 2003). The shorter food chain allows the farmer to take home more profit, but the time spent away from the field may hinder production (Jaroz 2008). Many high-end niches exist for small farmers willing to grow food that cannot be produced industrially such as heirloom fruits and vegetables and rare-breed livestock. There are many factors to consider, but an increasing number of small farmers are choosing direct marketing to increase their farm's viability. This phenomenon has a number of social and ecological consequences.

"Meet your Maker" is a slogan used by FarmFolk/CityFolk, a Vancouver-based agricultural advocacy group, to promote the merits of buying direct from the farmer. Interactions between farmers and consumers encourage both parties to think critically about the food system (Allen et al. 2003). This increased contact is part of a greater movement to build a moral economy of concern for people and nature (Allen 1999; Sage

[9] I say generally because very large farms can have a direct market

2002; Clarke et al. 2008). In the supermarket, "the homogenizing effects of placeless food provisioning" (Dupuis and Goodman 2005: 363) promote price as the main factor in decision-making, but at the farmers' market, society and polity are reintegrated into the economy (Lyson 2007). Some larger grocery store chains like Whole Foods are trying to emulate the moral economy with stories about small farms and their production practices on the labels and on placards in the store. While some of this may be authentic, much of it bears the thin veneer of slick marketing (Pollan 2006:173).

Community aggregates around sites of local food distribution, creating bonds of trust and cooperation between farmers and eaters (Jaroz 2008). These interactions, or "relations of regard" (Sage 2002) embed social relations around food and food production because there is a common set of values (or perceived values) that bring the two groups together in community spaces. Direct contact between farmers and eaters promotes a reworking of ecological and social relationships (Eaton 2008). Having farmers and producers 'visible' along with their products creates the opportunity for them to become more valued community members (Hinrichs and Lyson 2007).

Remembering Born and Purcell's caveat that there is nothing inherently better about scale or locale (2006), we must be aware that small does not always correlate to "artisanal" or progressive in terms of politics and social relations. However, small farmers who choose high quality production as a marketing niche are attracting attention in their regions. Rural economic campaigns are being billed around agri-tourism destinations where tourists can shop at farms and have an authentic rural experience

(Sage 2002; Eaton 2008). Vancouver Island has been featured in many culinary and tourist magazines that highlight the small artisan farms contributing to the distinctive island cuisine. This turn to quality is reviving rural pride in some regions and reinforcing *terroir*[10] distinctiveness. Other regions are re-creating or merely creating traditions in response to the demand for directly marketed farm products (Sonnino 2005). Much of this interest in farm products can be considered as cultural capital, which can have a positive effect when farming styles are based on the optimal use of local resources (Dupuis and Goodman 2005).

Direct marketing can entice a greater receptivity to diversity for producers and consumers (Ross 2005). Producers often require a wide assortment of products to attract customers consistently over the season, which encourages them to experiment and vary their products (Hinrichs and Lyson 2007). Customers who develop relationships with farmers will often be more receptive to trying new products, especially when the farmer can provide them with recipes and advice (Sage 2002). This push-pull at the market can translate into greater biodiversity on the farm that can be beneficial to the soil and can promote ecosystem health (Clarke et al 2008). On-farm crop diversity can reduce a farming family's reliance on the cash economy for their own food needs (Dupuis 2007).

Farmers were once the epicentre of the rural economy as economically independent and self-reliant producers. In many cases, farmers have now been reduced to contract

[10] A French term used to describe distinctive characteristics of a certain place that are bestowed upon its agricultural products. Soil, weather conditions, traditional practices and farming techniques all contribute to the unique qualities of the food.

suppliers of commodities for large corporate agribusiness (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Lyson 2007). Maynard (2005) maintains that small farms are not economically viable outside of particular niche markets and the main benefits of this type of farming are clearly related to family heritage, lifestyle and other social factors. Because of the amount of work involved in both growing and marketing, Goodman and Goodman state that "local and direct marketing arrangements … are effectively default choices for growers with few resources"(2008:14). They maintain that small farmers are relegated to economically marginal distribution channels.

In summary, farmers are turning to direct marketing as a means to capture more value from their production. This type of marketing is somewhat scale-limited because of the higher cost in terms of time and energy per unit of product sold as compared to wholesale. Bringing farmers and customers together has many implications for food democracy, for farm diversity, rural economic development and reviving traditions.

Summary of Literature Review

Small, local and direct marketing farmers are attracting attention of academics, planners and consumers. While there is nothing inherent about locale or scale, more immediate social relations between farmers and consumers can lead to more just and sustainable production practices. Within these relations, it is important to be reflexive about marginalization and social stratification. Small farming can be more productive, diverse and innovative than large-scale agriculture because the farmers can tailor production to suit the landscape. Direct

farm marketing promotes biodiversity because producers have incentive to broaden their offerings and to make the most from their farm's productive potential. Choosing to be a small, local and direct marketing farm as a strategy to increase on-farm viability is contrary to much of agricultural policy in Canada that has encouraged farmers to become larger, to compete globally and to focus on the export market

METHODOLOGY

Reflexive Overview

As a small-scale organic farmer, I know that there is a need for farmer-centered research. I have been the subject of many poorly executed research projects that have wasted my time, left me feeling used, and certain that no good would come from the research because the researcher had a misguided grasp of the issues. As a result of this tradition of extractive, self-interested research, the farming population is wary and weary of participating in research projects.

As new federal and provincial policy and programs are introduced, the disconnection between the people who research and write policy, and the farmers for whom the policy is written, is very apparent. I have discussed this problem in depth with other farmers at meetings and conferences, and have felt the despair, disappointment and rage about policy instruments that miss their mark, and programs that are inaccessible or ineffective because of very fundamental misunderstandings about what the agriculture sector needs.

My motivation for doing the research is to help inform policy that will take into account the needs of farmers on the Saanich Peninsula. Just as policy makers don't always know what farmers need, farmers themselves are often too busy to take time away from their operations to really reflect what they need from government, and what agriculture needs

as a whole. The problems in agriculture are unique and complex, and require some in-depth analysis. Having time to study small scale agriculture at the University of Victoria has been an opportunity to take time to reflect and to share what I have learned. I sincerely hope that this endeavour will have some value.

I met Alison Eagle through a contact with the Peninsula Agriculture Commission. At that time she was a researcher with the Resource Policy Economic Analysis group in the Economics department at the University of Victoria. She was also interested in conducting a study on agricultural policy and small farm viability. We felt our interests and skills sets were complementary, and because a condition of her funding was that a graduate student be involved with the project, it was a natural partnership.

We collaborated on setting up the study. I did all the interviewing, data organization, management, and coding. Since our approaches to understanding data were different, we each did our own type of data analysis. Alison is an economist and she is very competent at quantitative economic data analysis. She set up many of the excel tables found later in the data analysis section. I did the sociological analysis, creating categories, identifying themes, interpreting and making sociological sense of the data.

I felt confident about my position to undertake research of this nature. I felt inspired to be working with the other researchers from the University of Victoria because I knew that they would be able to interpret the data in ways that I alone could not. I also knew that they would lend the project the credibility to have the results read by government

policy analysts, and this was exciting to me. I felt assured that I would not be wasting farmers' time with this research, and that they would be well served by this project.

My interviewing style is honest and upfront with the participants. I told them about myself, about my business, and about how I wanted to use the research. I was concerned that some of the conventional growers might be biased against me because I am an organic grower, but I didn't sense that once in the field. Several of my farmer peers as well as my supervisors, when informed of my topic and my intentions, warned me that no one would share their financial information with me because I was too close. I was competition and this was a conflict of interest. This advice helped me approach the financial part of my survey with more caution, but in the end it wasn't a significant issue. I saw this as evidence that farmers don't necessarily see each other as competition, but rather as co-survivalists. Almost all the farmers didn't hesitate to show me their books, and to divulge sensitive financial information. I felt privileged and honoured that they were so open, trusting and giving.

I think I got farther with farmers than other researchers could because I had background knowledge, vocabulary, and passion for the topic. I also knew about 45% of the participants, and I think this might be why I got such a good response rate. A couple of the farmers I didn't know were familiar with my name because of the articles I write for the local farmer newsletter and the Certified Organic Association of BC (COABC) journal, and they indicated this was one of the reasons they opted to participate.

I wanted the process to be participatory but I was limited by the research design. Alison wanted to fit the answers into an excel spreadsheet for analysis. We designed room for some open-ended questions but it turned out that I didn't need them as much as I had thought. I felt most participants were more comfortable with the multiple-choice format than they would have been with more open-ended ethnographic style questioning. The reception I got from farmers was very positive. Some were clearly very busy and sped through the questions as fast as they could, others invited me to stay for 2 hours or more and just wanted to talk about the issues and challenges they faced trying to farm. I was careful to record quotes and statements from the interviews. The farmers had a lot to say, they had strong opinions and they often used anecdotes and examples that were very clear and told about the difficult and sometimes absurd situations that arose because of agricultural policy.

Project Design

Participant selection

As we were studying farm survival strategies, we wanted to target local, small, direct marketing farmers on the Saanich Peninsula. Preliminary research revealed that direct farm marketing and organic certification were two very important strategies, so it was appropriate that we select from these two populations. Contact names were selected from the Southern Vancouver Island Direct Farm Marketing Association and the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia.We also selected from the LifeCycles

Good Food Directory, and the Vancouver Island Travel Guide. Finally, an advertisement was sent out to local farmer listerves, and a poster was put up at a local farm supply store in an attempt to draw in potential participants who may have been missed by the original compilation, but these efforts had no impact on our final list.

Another benefit of choosing participants from these very public lists was that I didn't feel it was so invasive of their privacy. It is possible to contact anyone who is declaring farm income for tax purposes using a census-linked database that the University of Victoria had purchased from Statistics Canada but this wasn't necessary using our methods.

Once we had chosen our target population: locally-focused farms on the Saanich Peninsula, that were advertising on the direct farm marketing lists, we entered the 89 names of the farms into an excel spreadsheet and ran a random number generation function. Our goal was 30 farms. This number was chosen for us by the Farm Level Policy Institute, our funder, as the high end of an acceptable number of participants. A sample of 33 potential survey participants was selected from the list. A letter of invitation was sent to selected farmers, and a follow-up telephone call placed to determine willingness to participate and to schedule an interview time. We made repeated efforts to contact farmers by telephone and were unable to reach five people (four did not return telephone calls and the other was out of the country for an extended time). Two people on our list did not produce any food products for sale or were going out of business, and so were removed. Three others declined, with two explaining that

they were too busy to participate, and the other under too much farm-related stress.[11] Therefore, with these 23 participants we had a 70% response rate. Two additional participants from a farm cooperative were added during the survey process after we interviewed a fellow member of their group, bringing the total to 25.

Timing

I felt it was very important to undertake our research during the off-season (November – February) so that I could have the greatest chance of spending quality time with the farmers. Initially, I was hoping for late November, but the survey got delayed in the Ethics approval process. When we finally got started in early January, the timing was still good. I was very conscious about the burden on participants so one hour was chosen as the ideal time frame for an interview. I figured that participants might be more likely to agree to participate if we did not require a lengthy commitment, and I felt it was respectful to be as efficient as possible.

I scheduled appointments at least two and a half hours apart so as to ensure lots of time for discussion if the farmer chose to keep talking. I think the generous time allotment fostered more open, and more in-depth discussion. The ample time also ensured that I had some time immediately after the interview to review the notes I had taken and to add in more information, quotes, and to read over what I had written to verify accuracy. The

[11] The farmer declined to participate because of stress related to BC Assessment's recent reinforcement of non-ALR farm classification status in the region, which has resulted in split residential/farm classification for over 100 farms, significantly increasing property taxes and causing much public debate.

quotes I captured in this way have been invaluable in bringing farmers' voices directly into this work.

Implementation

We decided to use the interviewer-administrated survey as our option for the survey execution for three reasons. First we wanted to have the researcher present while the participant answered the questions so we could ensure a consistent interpretation of the material. Secondly, we recognized that the participants held a wealth of information on our subject area, and that by being physically present with them while reviewing the survey, we had a better chance of being offered additional interesting information that we hadn't thought about asking. This happened often and I was grateful for referrals from farmers for further reading as well as being informed about specific incidents of policy failure. Finally, the response rate for mail-in surveys is fairly low. We felt we would have a good chance of timely, and accurate data collection if we scheduled interviews.

Since we were asking very sensitive financial information, we decided that those questions would be closer to the end of the survey, but not right at the end. The reasoning behind this was that introductory questions and opinion questions would allow time for the interviewer to build rapport with the participant. However, we thought that we wouldn't leave the most important questions for the very end in case we ran out of time. This never happened fortunately. In addition, we mailed out a copy of the survey

questionnaire several weeks before the interview so that people could be prepared with their financial documents if they chose to share. Many of them had retrieved their financial statements from the past years and had them available for my perusal.

Finally, I did several call-backs to people to clarify information. An important part of my briefing to participants was that I might have to call them back to clarify information. Knowing that I had their verbal permission to do this was reassuring when I was doing the call-backs. One problem we ran into was that the age categories we had assigned didn't match the census data so I had to call back most participants to get more specific details about their age.

Survey design

My previous experience with interviewing was in a qualitative sociological style with very open-ended questions, being careful not to make any assumptions or to guide participants' answers in any way. Alison's experience was quite the opposite; she felt strongly about using multiple choice and Likert scales so the answers could be fitted into an excel spreadsheet. Reaching a compromise in this situation was fairly straightforward. Since I was going to be doing the interviews, we set up the survey using multiple-choice format, and I felt comfortable allowing farmers to expand on their answers if they wanted.

It turned out that the farmers were grateful for the multiple-choice options and it helped the survey process go faster with less burden on the participants. I was very pleased at the flexibility that we had with our data once in was entered in the excel spreadsheet. I feel that the potential loss of authenticity in doing the multiple-choice format was more than worth it for the potential for analysis and comparison that we have with our data. Moreover, there was space in the spreadsheet for adding in comments, so all the data could be contained in a single document.

In certain questions, like these about whether or not the Agricultural Land Reserve was working for the benefit of farmers, participants indicated difficulty in answering a simple yes/no in multiple-choice format. Their first answer would often be in the form of a laugh or a shrug of the shoulders. These questions required analysis on the part of the respondent, so the option for more open-ended questions was appreciated in these circumstances. Often the question elicited a discussion, at the end of which we would together decide how to rank the answer so it would most closely represent the participant's position. I took notes to qualify the answer and to ensure consistent interpretation. The binary frame for these questions provoked answers that helped to bring out the complex nature of regulating agriculture.

Maintaining rigour

One problem we encountered during the research process was that some farmers were not familiar with the policies mentioned in the opinion section of the survey. As a

researcher, I had to evaluate whether they had a sound understanding of the issue or whether they were trying to come up with an answer. One strategy I used frequently was to preface the exercise with a gesture of understanding that all the policies that I was going to inquire about may not be familiar to them, and that they should feel comfortable with a "don't know" answer because that in itself was a very important statement.

I got quite comfortable re-phrasing questions, or providing examples of situations where the policy might play out. I was very conscious of being neutral, of stating both sides and being as diplomatic as I could be, while using "real" language so that the conversation flowed naturally and the farmers felt comfortable.

With one farmer in particular I had problems with a language barrier. He clearly didn't understand many of the questions, yet he indicated a firm satisfaction with the answers that he was giving to me. I didn't feel comfortable changing his answers but on several occasions I asked the same question with different wording, and if he gave a different answer, I left the question blank or assigned a "don't know" answer.

Another interesting situation arose around one farmer's interpretation of the value of his wife's work on the farm, and the definition of "farming". Alison and I were very interested in finding out the number of female farm operators in the sample group. It became quite clear to me during the course of the interview that this farmer wasn't formally recognizing the structure of his farm as having two farm operators, although his

wife was doing an equal, if not greater portion of the farm labour. She was doing the accounting, the marketing, the managing of staff, packing and some harvesting, while he was making the plants grow. To him, "if you haven't got your hands dirty, you're not farming." Although I repeatedly tried rephrasing questions to get him to include his wife as a farm operator, he simply refused. He was the sole operator. I was conflicted about how to report this situation, but I decided in the end that I had to be faithful to the survey answers and I couldn't put words in his mouth. I did put a note on the spreadsheet. Fortunately I had to call back and check some data, and his wife answered the phone. When asked, she described her role as a farm operator, so I was able to change the data to reflect the reality of the situation.

Explanation of Interview Codes

The original list of potential participants contained 89 farms. This list was run through the random number generation function of Excel which sorted the list. We chose the top 33 farms to contact. When entering all the data on these farms, I kept the same assigned numbers from the original list. Hence, the code numbers I use to describe the farms later on in the thesis correspond to these numbers and not to the total number of interviews that I completed.

Situational Observation

All but three of the interviews were done in the kitchens of the participants. It is hard to quantify this observation because it was peripheral and haphazard, but it is nonetheless interesting. It was as if there were two types of homes that I was visiting. Scenario one was being greeted at the door with a compost pail on the front step, or perhaps walking through a mud room/garage area with filled with winter squashes and various boxes and baskets with onions and garlic or perhaps seeing squashes on display in the home as decorations. The countertops in the kitchen had produce on them. The kitchens looked well-used. If I had to sum them up in a sentence, I'd say these were places laden with food.

The second scenario was like walking into a regular suburban home. There might be a recycling bin in view full of typical food containers: bottles, cans and boxes. There were boxes and cans of food on the countertops. If I had to sum up these places, I would say they were in varying stages of assimilation into the dominant global food system.

My observations were limited because I only walked from the front door to the kitchen in all the homes, there most likely was more than I saw, but these two types of scenarios were notable. One of the questions in the economic section of the questionnaire was an estimation of the amount of money in the family budget that was saved per year because of farm-produced food. It was a difficult question because its hard to tally a whole year's worth of consumption. In retrospect, I believe I prompted people more than I should have because in my personal experience I feel that my income farming is not a lot, but I eat like royalty so this makes up in many ways for financial shortcomings. This is not

the case for all farmers. In some cases, farmers were reluctant to assign a value to the food they eat because it was all the damaged goods from the fields and left-overs from market. Others felt it was a shame that in the summer when the produce was plenty, they were so busy they didn't have time to cook.

Finally, in order to protect the identities of the farmers in this study, when writing about them, or using their quotes, I changed their gender and sometimes their type of farming. Even after altering this information, some of my peer editors (people who were very familiar with the farming community) were able to correctly identify the subjects. The farming community is small, and some farmer personalities are big. I decided to leave out some of my favourite quotes and case studies because there was no way to be true to the data and to protect these individuals.

Narrative Style

Throughout the interviews I was conscious to capture the farmers words because I wanted to give them a voice in this text. I found that their words said it best and I was pleased to be able to include quotes from them, I feel like this style provides a participatory element to the project.

DATA ANALYSIS

Sample Description

Our sample group of farmers was selected from a wider group of direct marketing farmers on the Saanich Peninsula. Farmers on the Saanich peninsula direct market 59% of total farm product value (Eagle 2010), hence this group represents a serious facet of agriculture. Since we selected a specialized group within the general farming population, our sample did have some significant discrepancies from the population (see Table 1).

Table 1. Farm characteristics on Saanich Peninsula – 2006, contrast direct-marketing farms (survey) with all farms (Agricultural Census)

	All Farms	
	Survey [a]	Census [b]
Farms with < $10,000 gross farm receipts	20%	65%
Average gross receipts ($)	196,000	82,000
Farm-related debt (% of farms)	20%	23%
# of operators/farm	2.0***	1.4
Farms with only 1 operator	28%***	61%
Female operators (% of total)	53%*	39%
Average age of operators, years	50.5***	55.0
Paid agricultural work		
Farms with employees (%)	76%***	37%
Weeks of paid work/farm	159	120
Farm Size Categories (% of farms)		
< 10 acres	48%	60%
10-69 acres	44%	33%
> 70 acres	8%	6%
Total farm area (acres/farm)	32.3	25.0
Land owned (acres/farm)	22.0	20.6
Land Use (acres/farm)[c]		
Land in crops	23.4	12.1
Natural land for pasture	0.2	4.1
Woodlands, wetland, & Xmas trees	2.1	3.0
Organic farms, % of total[d]	64%	28%
Certified organic, % of total	36%***	3%

Source: Agricultural Census, Statistics Canada; and Direct Marketing Survey

*, ** and *** denote statistically significant difference at the 0.10, 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively

[a] Survey n=25

[b] Census n= 510

[c] Land-use is reported as a proportion of all farms, even if farms may not have land in the respective category

[d] Census reports farms as organic if 50% or more of gross receipts are in that category

The farms in our survey had much higher gross receipts because they were selected from a group that was very active in self-promotion and marketing (listing with the Direct Marketing Association and/or a certified organic association). We also had a much higher percentage of certified organic producers in our survey as in the census data (36% vs 3%) because they were directly targeted for participation. Our sample had much lower farm debt that the census farms, and the census farms had much lower debt than the provincial (39%) and national average (60%). This can be partially explained by the prevalence of very small, in the sample area, the greater crop diversification which acts as a buffer to complete crop failure, and the tendency in our sample for farmers to substitute labour for capital (starting slow and building).

Our sample had a higher percentage of multiple operators, female operators and paid employees. We can infer that this is from the higher labour requirement for direct marketing but more analysis, especially concerning the higher number of female operators is required. The average age of farm operators in our sample was younger (50 vs 54.5) than the general farming population. This reflects a Statistics Canada finding than demonstrates younger farmers tend to have higher yielding farms (2006).[12] . Retired or retiring farmers will understandably have less production. The intensity of land use in our sample of farms was significantly higher; almost twice as high in the small farm

[12] It is important to note that age isn't the variable here, and there are intermediate factors like stage in a career because older farmers can be lumped into categories with mostly retired farmers.

category as for the census farms (23.4% vs 12.1%). This will account for the more than doubled gross receipts in this size category.

The majority of the farmers in our survey were selling field vegetables, followed by berries, orchard crops, greenhouse products and hay. There were several mixed operations with eggs and poultry (one with pigs). Livestock farming, including poultry, I learned was restricted by higher input costs (feed, buildings, labour), limited inspected slaughter facilities and supply managed marketing systems that restrict entry due to high quota costs.

Table 2. Crop types grown by surveyed farms

Crop Type	Percent of Farms	Percent of Total Area
Grains	4	3.7
Vegetables – field	64	73.9
Vegetables – greenhouse	20	0.7
Orchard crops	32	3.1
Berries	44	10.2
Vineyard crops	8	0.6
Pasture	20	6.2
Other crops[b]	32	1.6
Livestock (poultry, eggs, hogs)	12	---
TOTAL	---[a]	100%

[a] Total is more than 100% because individual farms are included in up to four different crop type categories

[b] Other crops include flowers, hay, nursery (horticultural plants or fruit trees), seeds, stinging nettle, bedding plants

Eighty percent of the farms in our survey did not add value to their products by means of processing. Of the 20% who did value-add, only 2 farms were significantly invested for specialty processing (wine and alcoholic beverages). A third farm was mostly engaged in value-added production but the farmer operated with regular household equipment for canning, drying and processing her fruit and seeds.

Table 3. Marketing channels utilized by direct-marketing farmers on Saanich Peninsula

Product sales channel	Farms participating	Total of all products sold
Wholesalers	24%	10.7%
Distributors	20%	1.7%
Co-operatives	8%	12.6%
Farmers' Markets	44%	2.7%
Farm stand/U-Pick	64%	54.2%
CSA[a]/Home Delivery	8%	0.5%
Off-farm retail	20%	15.9%
Restaurants	12%	1.7%
TOTAL	---[b]	100.0%

[a] CSA is Community Supported Agriculture or "box program", where customers receive a weekly or bi-weekly box of produce from a local farm, generally paying a yearly subscription fee ahead of time.

[b] Total is greater than 100% because many farms use more than one marketing channel.

Leasing farmland was an opportunity for farmers in our survey to achieve greater farm income. Farmers in our survey leased 32% of their total productive land and had 32% of gross income coming from leased land. The cost of leasing land varied greatly. The average price on leased land per year was $1070/ha ($433/acre), ranging from $330/ha to $2470/ha. This variance in price range was partly due to physical properties of the land and its improvements (drainage, fencing, access to water) but it also reflected social factors. 60% of leasers indicated that they leased land at below-market rates either because landlords wanted to support local and/or organic agriculture or the leasing arrangement was between family members. Landlords also benefited from having their land is assessed as agricultural instead of residential, with property tax savings of $1220 to $1910 on a typical-sized lot of two hectares with land market value of $165,000/ha[13] (Eagle, 2009). This finding has important implications for policy around land use.

[13] The land market value does not include any buildings, either farm or residential.

Table 4. Selected income and investment characteristics of direct marketing farms and farmers on the Saanich peninsula, by farm size[a]

	- - - Farm Size By Gross Receipts - - -		
	Small (<$25,000)	Medium ($25,000-249,999)	Large (>$250,000)
Off-farm income, % of household income	72%	68%	11%
Farm work load			
Full-time, Year-Round, % of farms	25	20	57
Full-time, Seasonal, % of farms	38	60	29
TOTAL full-time, %	63	80	86
Rented land, % of total	19	28	33
Average gross receipts, $'000/acre	4.8	20.0	27.4
(range of gross receipts, $'000/acre)	(0.3 – 12.0)	(2.1 – 74.1)	(1.8 – 75.0)
Average net income, $'000 per FT operator[b]	3.8	17.1	93.4
Recent investments, past 5 years	- - - - - - % of farms (average $'000) - - - - - -		
Fencing	63% (5.9)[c]	60% (5.2)	71% (6.3)
Long-term soil amendments	75% (3.0)	80% (4.9)	86% (46.0)
Machinery	25% (12.8)	40% (20.0)	71% (149.0)
Irrigation system	38% (1.5)	10% (2.0)	43% (23.7)

[a] All values are mean of all farms in category, except where otherwise indicated

[b] Net farm income is calculated prior to any wages taken for farm operators

[c] Values in brackets are average of those farms who made such investments

Barriers and Challenges Facing These Farmers

The farmers reported extraordinary incidences of conflict and challenges with neighbours. We can infer this from the high population density on the Saanich Peninsula as compared to typical rural landscapes, and the small lot size of the farms. The farms were perhaps more innovative, and more demanding in terms of their need to attract customers, hence they disrupted conventional notions of what farms should and shouldn't be. Whatever the cause, the findings were significant:

• 36% of farmers surveyed spent time and/or money dealing with neighbour complaints in the past year.

• 56% of the farmers modified or entirely changed their farming activities in order to avoid conflict with neighbours

• 33% installed vegetative barriers

• 22% participated in agricultural awareness or environmental conservation efforts, with the aim to improve their image in the community and/or increase their neighbours' understanding and support for their farming activities.

• An average of 240 hours and $6,560 was spent in past year by our participants dealing with or preventing neighbour complaints, trespass and vandalism.

The small lot nature of agriculture in Saanich and the relatively high population density

puts pressure on the farmers to conform to suburban standards with regard to noise, traffic and other disturbances.

Description of the Sample:

From the data, four clusters of farm types emerged: first generation niche-oriented, second generation, alternative/diversified, and second career. I initially searched the literature for existing categories to help me make sense of what I was seeing. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada have developed categories for farm classification that were the closest that I could find but even these categories could not fully capture what was happening on the farms. In the end, I decided to make my own categories, based on the data. It is important to state that all the farms are complex entities and the categories I created are not definitive, but rather generalizations that help us understand some of the background that farmers share as well as the strategies they are pursuing for viability. It is important to note that the categories I have chosen are not absolute, and there is some overlap, the farms all share some attributes: they are all struggling with viability, and farmers are cynical about the policy environment in which they operate. As we will see, these farmers have learned that negotiating the regulatory environment leaves them with few options for success.

First Generation Niche-Oriented Farmers

This group is comprised of three of the twenty-five participants. These are people who are all first generation farmers. They have targeted a niche in agriculture and have entered with entrepreneurial intent. This is not to say there is not a strong ideological component to this career choice, but these farmers have done their market research and have specifically set out to exploit a niche market that could offer a return on their considerable investment. They are the most heavily invested of all three clusters, all having well over $1,000,000 worth of investment in infrastructure. All three are family enterprises, with 2 or more siblings of a family investing together. Two thirds are jointly operated by 4 or more family members. There are two greenhouse ventures and one vineyard/tourist destination in this category.

Method of production

Two of the three participants are practicing conventional agriculture with IPM methods, and one of three is certified organic. Their approach to farming requires mechanization for all parts of production. For the greenhouse operations, their industrial nature causes problems with neighbours: light pollution at night and water run-off during the rainy season. For the vineyard there is conflict because of the increased traffic on their rural road.

There is a lot of pressure on these farmers for output because they are so heavily financially invested. They are constantly balancing expenditures on season extension (lighting, heating, storage) with additional output. The debt load that these farmers carry

puts a focus on production over stewardship or other agricultural values. They have the highest income-earning potential of all the farmers because they have the best infrastructure, but the nature of their highly specific and mechanized operations (greenhouses must maintain exact specifications for temperature, airflow and disease prevention; vineyard must rely on specific chemistry in wine batches) is more stressful and less conducive to high quality of life.

Relationship to the regulatory environment: resigned

> "We got fined by the CFIA for using a pesticide, that is approved for our tomatoes, on our flowers. They are in the same damn greenhouse! C'mon people, where's the sense?"(Int. 27)

This group has the most problems with the regulatory environment because they are too large to operate under the radar, and too innovative to fit into the conventional framework. They are angered by the limitations imposed on them, and by the seemingly illogical carriage of policy. They don't have the historical understanding of the policy environment as do the second-generation farmers, so they spend a lot of energy on research, advocating for change and meeting with regulators. Interestingly, these farmers were not as involved in a volunteer capacity working on boards or representing their commodity groups as were the second-generation farmers. This sample is quite small so it's hard to draw a conclusion here, but it suggests that they are not as embedded in the system as their more experienced counterparts who are trying to change the system from within.

> "I just packed an overnight bag, pajamas and toothbrush and a good book, and I went to the Central Saanich office and told them I had had enough, and that I was going to camp there until they gave me the permit. Sure enough, I got it by the end of the day." (Int. 27)

> "I found out after-the–fact that the working group on agri-tourism for Central Saanich had already met, on an evening in mid-summer. What farmer could make it at that time of year?...and then the comment period was over. I was stewing mad." (Int. 16)

Second Generation Commercial-Scale Farmers

This subgroup is comprised of seven of the twenty-five participants. They are all (at least) second-generation farmers who have been involved in agriculture, for the most part, for all of their lives.

> "How long have I been farming? How old am I? I was raised on the seat of a tractor so you could say I've been at this all my life." (Int. 25)

All of the farms have some intergenerational aspect, whether it's several generations farming together or the farm has been passed down. There is a sense of identity with the farming as an occupation. Several of the farming families in the study have rural roads in the region named after them, and their farms form distinctive landmarks on the peninsula. They are clearly part of the landscape and embedded in the community.

These farmers are heavily invested in their operations, both financially and emotionally. They have the most farming equipment of all of the farmers in the study. They have specialized infrastructure for storage, washing and refrigeration. It is difficult to assess

the value of these assets because many are very old, but well built and highly functional, so their replacement cost would be significant.

They are mostly full-time farmers, half with a spouse bringing in income from off-farm. They have the lowest level of formal education of the survey group, the average was high school level. Of all the farms in the survey, these are the most male dominated. There are women operators involved with 5/7 these operations but in 3/5 they either don't play a central role or they aren't acknowledged for their role.

Method of production

This group of farmers has the largest area under production, with an average of 98 acres each. They are heavily invested in large machinery. They all have tractors, and specialized equipment for working the soil, for harvesting and processing their production. Their style of production is commercial with a significant reliance on labour. While they seem very large in comparison to other farms on the peninsula, they are relatively small compared to farms in the rest of Canada and North America. None is an organic producer, although most have introduced IPM[14] methods to reduce pesticide use. It is important to note that the IPM training has been sponsored by the government as a stewardship initiative.

[14] Integrated Pest Management is a system of pesticide reduction highly promoted by the BC Ministry of Agriculture. It involves close observation and insect counts before applying pesticide and between repeat applications. The end result is said to be more effective than broad spectrum pesticide application, and it saves the farmer money because the chemicals are costly.

> "We've stopped spraying the berries altogether. We can at least promise our customers that. The other crops are tougher…asparagus is impossible because of the beetles. People know it's hard. Mistakes are expensive but we're learning. It's different year to year but we're definitely using less product out there." (Int. 55)

> "The guys from Agro-West (a farm products dealership) have come out to the farm and they're showing me how to use less." (Int. 49)

Farm labour is a major issue for farms of this scale. These farmers struggle to find and retain staff because of the low wage and more demanding physical work expectations. Some have been able to achieve staff loyalty through creating year-round positions but the rest continue to be challenged and to face uncertainties with staffing at critical times of the year. Two of the seven farms represented reported having a positive experience with using foreign labour through a federal Mexican farm labour program, but others reported challenges housing seasonal labour.

Relationship to regulatory environment: embedded

Farmers in this cluster have a historical connection with the regulatory environment. They understand the origin of the different layers of policy that govern them and they work from this framework. They have a familiarity with all the rules, so they can offer interesting analysis of where the loopholes lie and why seemingly non-sensical regulations are in place.

They are committed to being heard by regulators and to making the system work for farmers. Many have held, or continue to hold, board positions in farm organizations or have represented their commodity groups both provincially and nationally. During the interviews, to prove points or to help me understand background, the farmers were able to give me recent copies of their farm industry and/or government publications. This is anecdotal evidence of their participation in the regulatory system and process. All the farmers expressed frustration with the regulatory system. They described in detail how regulations had directly hindered or harmed their operations.

> "The health regulations require us to have washroom facilities and a hand washing station because of the [specific agri-tourism attraction]. We are literally 100ft from the municipal sewer line, but can we connect up and save ourselves thousands of dollars?…no because we're on ALR land."
> (Int. 55)

There was no talk of resistance or non-compliance but rather of the idiocy of regulators who just didn't understand the reality farmers were living.

> "What bugs me about bureaucracy is not the system, it's the people that are in charge… We're creative, positive people who see ways things can get done. The inspectors and bureaucrats come in with their do–nots: don't this and can't that… that's not how we think." (Int. 14)
>
> "We had agent here from BC Assessment to map our farm for tax purposes. He didn't know what sillage is….And he was assessing our land for its agricultural activities?!" (Int 55)
>
> "I get so sick of all the politicians claiming credit for the ALR. The ALR is all on the backs on farmers. We're the ones taking the hit, making the countryside a pretty picture for all the folks who buy their groceries at Safeways." (Int. 55)

Alternative and Diversified Farmers

This group is comprised of eight of the twenty-five participants. This category was adapted from the AAFC category "Lifestyle Farmers." It was not a hard decision to discard this title because the farmers in the study were motivated by much more than lifestyle. These farmers display the highest diversity of the four groups. All but one of the participants are first generation farmers. They are ideologically invested in agriculture and they are making their operations work despite many obstacles; first and foremost is financial viability. I want to emphasize that farms in this category represent for-profit ventures, but their path to farming was guided by an ideological motivation.

Most of the farmers in this category are motivated by a desire to provide an alternative to the conventional food system while earning an income. They indicated a high level of satisfaction with their farm income. "Satisfaction" is a difficult indicator to hold across diverse boundaries because it is highly relative. Five of the farmers indicated surprise that they could actually make a significant portion of their income farming. Hence satisfaction to this subset may be different from satisfaction to the second-generation farmer who has invested or inherited everything in his or her farming operation. Income to these farmers is more difficult to assess because some are combining careers. An example is a participant who was consulting and farming, where consulting takes priority but contracts are few and far between, another participant was raising children and farming, because extra money can be earned by working from home where none could be earned otherwise.

Other motivational forces behind these farmers include a desire for an alternative lifestyle, concern for the well-being of the environment, distrust of multi-national corporations dominating the food supply chain, awareness of the loss of genetic diversity, fascination with traditional farming skills, and concern about the loss of farmers/farmland/food sovereignty. Three of the alternative/diversified farmers represent women in their child-rearing years who are determined to provide a rural lifestyle for their children while providing a secondary income (or in one case a primary income) to their families.

> "The more I learn about global warming, the more committed I feel to this work. Given the state of things, I can't not do this work" (Int. 8)
>
> "I don't trust where our food supply is coming from…I feel the global organic movement has its problems too. That's why I'm working here with the other organic farmers, to build our own source (of food) so we have an alternative." (Int. 9)

These farmers have the lowest investment of any of the farmers. Six are operating on leased land, all but two use hand tools and small machines, If they do processing on the farm, it is simple freezing, canning and drying that they do in their home kitchens. The average educational level of the ideologically motivated farmers is at least a bachelor's degree and in several cases a graduate degree. Anecdotal evidence tells me that these farmers are incredibly resourceful, and absolutely committed to maintaining their values in their farming. I would wager that many of these farmers would opt to take an off-farm job rather than compromising their principles in order to get a crop off the land. Fortunately, crop diversity works to their advantage in dire circumstances because when one crop fails there are many others to buffer the loss. This is different than the first and

second generation farmers who have a lot more invested in their operations, and have less diversity to buffer them. The consequences for failure are greater for the more heavily invested farmers.

Method of production

All of these farmers have stated a commitment to the highest level of land stewardship possible, with seven of eight farmers being certified organic. They are highly diversified so that they can rotate crops, encourage wildlife and insects, and minimize impact on the land. They are also interested in diversity because they are food self-sufficient to some degree (they are the only farmers in the survey who indicated a significant financial savings due to their production) and this variety allows them to furnish a higher percentage of their own diet. Again, these farmers had the lowest level of investment for the whole surveyed group, most operated with a single rototiller, although 2 of the 8 skewed this generalization because they were highly financially invested in specialized machinery.

A problem shared by the majority of these farmers was the lack of funds to secure appropriate infrastructure for their farms. They spend a lot of time and effort "making do" each year because they couldn't afford to do otherwise. Examples were buying in expensive compost because they don't have a tractor to turn their compost piles, installing temporary fences (that fall down in the snow) rather than proper metal fencing, and missing out on earning income from hosting events on the farm because they don't

have a structure to accommodate people. This lack of appropriate infrastructure translates into inefficiency and extra work that has an overall impact on viability.

Three of the farmers in our survey mentioned relying on seasonal help on the farm, either full-time or part-time. All of the organic farmers, in particular, mentioned the important role of volunteers and apprentices in their farm.

> "Over the years I've come to realize the value of having help on the farm. Yes, I can do it all, but I can't get it done exactly when it needs doing. Nature is full of these deadlines, and if you can hit those planting and harvesting deadlines bang on, then your farm can yield an extra round of crops, and that's when the money for wages really pays. The trouble is getting good help right when you need it." (Int. 14)

> "I built 'an extension' on the back of my shed as a seasonal wwoofer[15] cabin. Travelers find me on the website and they come and stay for a few days or maybe a few weeks. Its irregular, but I take what I can get. They are a blessing, well 99% of the time [laugh]. They work in exchange for room, board and a rural experience. It gives me an infusion of good energy, enthusiasm and satisfaction about how much gets done. They leave with memories. Its beautiful. I could never afford regular help, but with the wwoofers my farm is bigger than I could do alone and more viable." (Int. 1)

These were the only farmers who commented that the erosion of agricultural infrastructure was hindering their potential as farmers. This is an interesting observation because I thought it would be the second generation farmers who would be the most affected by the loss of infrastructure. What I think is happening here is that agricultural infrastructure has eroded at the same rate as agriculture in general. The second generation farmers have been able to keep the infrastructure they needed, or collectively supported the best mechanics, dealers, processors, etc. They have slowly curtailed their operations to manage within the parameters of the infrastructure. The newer farmers, in

[15] WWOOF – Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms is an informal network of farms and travelers interested in volunteer placements in sustainable agriculture

this category in particular, are coming into agriculture with ideas garnered from books and the internet. They are pushing the boundaries and are realizing that there isn't the agricultural infrastructure to support their business plans.

> "There's so much that I can't do on my farm that I could have done 50 years ago, and that's a shame. I can't plant a big orchard because we've no cold storage. There used to be a cold storage facility run by the growers coop. I can't grow grain because we've no railway to transport it. It's a joke to think of renting trucks to haul it to the nearest mill. Can't do seed crops in any significant way because there's no threshing equipment, forget sheep for meat – there's one abbatoir and he's about 80 years old - but what about wool. There's a market for wool but no mill. If we're going to go about this local farm revival, a guy can't do it alone." (Int. 83)

Relationship to the regulatory environment: resistant

Almost all of the farmers in this category were small enough to operate under the radar of the major layers of regulation. Many were very vocal about the problems and constraints of the system, especially the health regulations. They reported being worried to even inquire about regulations in case they became enrolled and enlisted by authorities. They cited instances where if they were enrolled in the regulatory framework, they would be put out of business. An example is a farmer who took a class to get certified with Food Safe out of interest. As she watched a video in the class, teaching restaurant workers to refuse products delivered in vans without refrigeration, she realized that she could not stay in the class for fear that once she was trained in Food Safe practices, she would "know better" and might be held liable because she delivered produce in a non-refrigerated truck, and would likely never be able to afford one. She

felt very comfortable delivering fresh produce to customers on the day it was picked: she has had her water tested and is diligent about food handling practices on the farm. The one-size-fits-all regulatory environment either forces farmers like this jump through unnecessary hoops at great cost, or encourages them to stay under the radar.

These farmers skirted regulations by processing chickens themselves on the farm and selling to friends and neighbours in a closed network, by running a CSA program to extend their farm gates[16] and by crossing their fingers that authorities will never show up at the farm, or that they will be blessed by blind inspectors.

> "I think what the bureaucrats don't grasp is that we eat the stuff [the chicken that we've processed on the farm], we sell it to our friends and neighbours who come and buy it from us like they have for years. We live food safety because we love the people in our community who support the farm. The bonds in this network are stronger than the check marks on the forms at the slaughter plant. What we have here is built on trust and respect rather than some bureaucratic process." (Int. 14)

> "I don't want to use bleach in my washing area. It's a known carcinogen…The food safety people want me to have new plastic countertops. I have built my washing area out of recycled wood because that's what I can afford and this is what feels right to me. Wood has natural enzymes that protect against some bacteria…I'm not doing any processing, just carrots, lettuces and green onions for the market…I feel good about how clean I keep things, and how careful I am but whenever a film crew comes in here to shoot for community events or whatever, I never bring them back here because I get worried some food safety enthusiast is going to freak out…" (Int. 1)

> "So all I hear about is regulations, regulations, regulations but then farmers are not required to get their water tested. Organic farmers are, but just every second year. I got a test back that said 'non-fecal coliforms' and a number. The lab couldn't help me, so I called the Organic certification folks, and they didn't know, so I called VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority) and they didn't

[16] There are different regulations for farmers who sell on their property (farm gate sales) than for farmers who sell at markets and through wholesale channels. CSA programs are classified as "farm gate" sales, so farmers may opt for this method of sales to prevent dealing with health authorities.

> know, so they told me to call the Ministry of Agriculture, and they had 2 standards but they weren't sure. I was frustrated because to change things was going to cost a lot. I went ahead and connected to city water but in the end nobody knew what levels were acceptable. I was shocked!" (Int. 10)

Second Career Farmers

Seven of the twenty-five farmers fell into the category of "second career" farmers. Again, this title has been adapted from the AAFC category of "retirement farmers." I would not consider any of these farmers retired judging by the considerable time and effort they devoted to their businesses. They were more highly invested than the lifestyle farmers, but less than the first and second-generation commercial-scale farmers. Two of these farmers were the exception, and were so highly invested that they depended on the farm for the majority of their income. These farmers were the most experimental with their crops, had the best documentation of their production, and were accessing the most specialized of markets.

The driving force behind these farmers was quite diverse. Two had had careers in agriculture support services, and were keen to put their experience into practice. Another two had driving passions (growing flowers and drinking wine) that they turned into for-profit ventures. The remaining three had long dreamed of farming and had retired from or quit their careers in order to farm. It was clear that the pleasure of farming supersedes the need to maximize profits for the majority of these farmers.

This category is the most controversial because it popularly considered "hobby farming." It can be a derogative term that belittles the efforts of small farmers. While

there are farms on the peninsula who could be fairly accused of "farming tax benefits," (this refers to estate owners who are doing the minimum agricultural production to qualify for lower property taxes) this is not as widespread a practice as some would suggest. It is clear that the tax break acts as catalyst to start up farms; it is an incentive to invest in one's property or to sign a lease with a farmer. Once the farm is up and running, a closer examination can reveal significant public benefit in the form of food security, employment, economic spin-offs, and aesthetic interest. Most of the second career farmers in this survey were very engaged in the sector.

Method of production

For the most part, these farmers had the means to furnish their farms with appropriate infrastructure, unlike the alternative/diversified farmers who were hindered by lack of infrastructure. In many cases, they are able to access high end markets because their products and display are very high quality. The second career farmers demonstrated the least diversity of all the farmers in the survey. Six of seven were involved almost exclusively in one crop family: berries, garlic, flowers, fruit trees, grapes or kiwi.

Three of the second career farmers were very innovative in their approach to farming. It could be said that their pioneering efforts in little-explored niches have paved the way for others to enter these markets. For example: one of the first certified organic farms on the peninsula that was started by a second career farmer almost twenty years ago. It

was then a relatively unknown field. The farmer was able to invest in appropriate infrastructure and was very open to sharing his knowledge. Another example is a retired agriculture researcher who was very familiar with plant breeding. He developed innovative pruning techniques and experimented with varieties that work well in this climate. As result, home based nurseries have gotten a very good reputation and the public flocks to his plant sales.

Anecdotal evidence told me that these farms had the best documentation of their production. When I mailed out the survey questions, I had asked everyone for access to financial records. Overall, very few farmers presented me with their actual farm records. I felt that this was a sensitive subject, so I didn't press anyone who didn't readily present their records to me. Four of seven second career farmers had complete sets of records for my perusal ready at the interview. It is this type of conscientious record keeping, and the willingness to share it, is invaluable for learning about farm viability.

Relationship to the regulatory environment: Vocal and persistent

Perhaps it is their stage of life (older) or their position of privilege (wealthy, well-educated, or both), but several of these farmers have been very influential on policy change. They arguably have more time and more of a mainstream view about how things should operate. Whatever it is, their ability to speak to power has been a boon to agriculture. One fought the chicken quota system for organic producers (and won-not

single handedly, but he deserves much credit); one challenged municipal zoning regulations for on-farm marketing (and won); a third challenged regulations about agri-tourism (and won). I didn't get an inventory of all the regulations they had taken on without success but it would be interesting for further study. Through other dealings in the farming community I can cite examples of many other second career farmers who take on big issues for the rest of the farmers. It is important work, and the second career farmers are ideally suited for it because they have a unique perspective.

Concluding Remarks on Clusters

The four clusters of farmers that are represented in our survey demonstrate the diversity of farmers who are commercially operating on the Saanich Peninsula. Based on their life experience, their income expectations and their ability to navigate the regulatory environment, they are experiencing differing levels of success and viability.

THEMES FROM LITERATURE REVIEW TO ANALYSIS

This chapter links theory to practice. Themes from the literature are juxtaposed to the study findings in order to more fully explore themes and trends. This is followed by a closer examination of the four clusters of farmers.

Local

With the increase in interest for local food, the producers in our survey had set opinions about the definition of local and how it should be applied. There was definitely an element of market protectionism in this discourse. Jaroz (2008) refers to the political, cultural and historical forces that come together to shape alternative food movements. Most farmers in the survey acknowledged that they were each others' allies in the effort to have more localized production, and were open to acknowledging complications like privileging market access.

> "We had this debate at the farmers' market…a mixed farmer from Metchosin was upset about an apple farmer from Saltspring Island coming to the market [Moss Street Market in Victoria] because there was concern he'd be flooding the market with his non-local apples. As it wore on, someone brought up the point that, as the crow flies, Saltspring is closer to the market than Metchosin…and anyway the supermarkets are still flooded with New Zealand apples…so we decided we should just be building the market for 'regional' apples or whatever term is going to work…" (Int. 13)

Another controversy that was raised during the interviews was misrepresentation of produce at farmers' markets and farm stands. As interviewee 12 explains:

> "For people to come all this way for produce, it needs to be worth their while. They're gonna stop coming if they can only get a couple of things. There's a lot of traffic out this way during strawberry season. We're a bit cooler on this side, so we're a couple weeks later with the berries… I always check with Dan (another local farmer) to see what he's

> got and I buy from him first, but if he doesn't have it and the customers want it, I call the distributor for BC products." (Int. 12)

Other farmers in the survey who use this practice claim that their profit margins are so small that having the products from the distributors helps pay for staffing time at the market or farm stand. Farmers who were opposed to this practice accused those farmers of being deliberately vague about labeling the origin of the products.

> "It cheapens what we do. Local products speak for themselves –beans picked that day have the 'snap', strawberries have the 'sheen' or whatever. If we're passing off grocery store quality for farm quality we're shooting ourselves in the foot. I think people would feel ripped off if they knew." (Int. 49)

Misrepresentation also happens at restaurants and grocery stores. Since local ingredients have earned a cachet for their intrinsic properties, many restaurants feature local ingredients on the menu.

> " It happens to us a lot, they buy symbolic quantities of a few things and then plastered on their menu in bold type is 'We use local ingredients from x farm'. I don't care so much about being used, it's the lost opportunity that kills me. When some lady orders her first salad with 'wild artisan greens,' I want her to experience the real deal –a bouquet of flavours and textures that will knock her socks off. When you eat it, you get it…how special it all is. Instead, she gets served generic salad with my name on it and leaves the restaurant unchanged." (Int. 13)

> "I get angry when I see certain businesses that thrive on their reputation for local, organic ingredients. They give the line "We buy local and organic whenever possible." I grow local organic ingredients, and lots of them. But these companies won't buy from me because I can't match their prices from the California distributor. Do they let their customers know that its rarely possible for them to buy local?" (Int. 13)

Abuse of the local label is bound to happen as this category of food develops a cachet. Farmers need protection from this type of fraud. Farmers described seeing this type of abuse often but they were hesitant to report a business because sometimes those

businesses did buy their products and they didn't want to burn bridges. Clearly more discussion around this issue is needed. Pertinent in this discussion is Chiappe and Flores' (1998) analysis of the feminization of agriculture. Is the purpose of local production for the nurturing of communities through working together to feed each other from the earth (feminine) or is it for the commodification of food as another product for sale on the world market (masculine). There is clearly a tension here between the two motivating forces.

Some of the emotions that flare up in farmers around the local debate stem from the establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve in 1973. When the provincial government at the time changed the zoning on the province's most arable land and limited its use to strictly agricultural, it made a promise to farmers that they would help make farming profitable. Bill 9, The Farm Income Assurance Act of 1973 was introduced to raise the commodity revenues so they would more closely approximate costs of production. (Garrish, 2003) The FIA was abandoned in the 1990s along with other agricultural support programs.

There is an understandable tension for farmers when they hear urban people rally behind the ALR and preserving farmland. Some farmers feel that they give their life to the cause: long hours of labour for little return. Need they give up potential retirement income (money they could earn by selling their land) too? Everyone else seems to be entitled to sell their land for market value. Why are farmers in this special category with no support from the rest of the population? The turn to local food could help ease this bitterness. If farmers could make a decent living from agricultural land, they would perhaps feel better about holding the land.

Connelly et al (2006) detail rural governance models in the U.K that propose collaborative approaches to sharing the burden of preserving public goods in the rural context. This challenge is being faced in most parts of the world. More research into how to redistribute the benefits of preserving rural lands back to the stakeholders would be a welcome initiative.

Local Trap

All of the organic farmers in the survey expressed frustration with the new focus on local rather than on production practices. They identified the "local trap" with their assertions about destructive production practices that happen on the peninsula:

> "There's a large farm on the peninsula that has such bad stewardship practices that you can point out its many parcels from an aerial map –they are all the same hue of 'Round-up' brown (Round-up is a commercial name for glyphosate, a herbicide). They applied for certification but they were denied because of their dependence on x. [a chemical preservative for their main crop.] Now they are coming to market with an "organically grown" banner on their vegetables. It's hard not to get angry!" (Int. 10)

> "There was a farmer at our market making a false claim about local organic fruit. As a certified organic grower, I know that I'm more educated about labeling laws and criteria around the use of organic. I wanted to educate rather than enforce, so I waited until a quiet time and I purchased some of the offending cherries. I asked where they came from, and when he didn't know the name of the farm but he assured me it was Okanagan fruit, I told him the kind of information and documentation he required to legally make the claim on his banner. To say the least, he didn't appreciate the gesture, and he continued making false claims all season…"(Int. 12)

When asked about how they might go about finding a solution to this problem, there was reluctance and resignation. Interview 12 mentioned the CFIA and how it was going to be possible under the new organic standards to launch a complaint by providing your name and a photograph of the offending incident. Most of the farmers were opposed to this form of tattling; they were reluctant to widen the gap between the organic and the conventional producers

because they felt that they had more in common than they have differences. Cohesiveness is a key feature at farmers markets, and producers indicated that customers can feel "bad energy" and they themselves didn't want to be ostracized as the source of the problem.[17] Interestingly, organic producers are mostly the newcomers on the scene. They recognize that most of the farming culture and infrastructure (especially in rural Saanich) pre-dates them so they are looking for acceptance rather than to rock the boat. Several farmers indicated they felt their customers were saavy to this false advertising so they didn't worry about it. Other organic producers felt that this type of fraud strengthened the certified organic brand.

The spatial and ethical dimensions of organic agriculture are challenged in this new turn to local (Clarke, 2008). Since its grassroots inception in the 1960s, organic has occupied the niche as the more environmentally friendly option. As the 100-mile diet rhetoric takes hold of the public imagination, organic is being displaced. Organic producers in our study were starting to feel that they were losing ground, but they were still dedicated to their certification program as a means to keep the bar set high.

Embedded Relations

Farmers described strong ties with each other. All of our survey participants sought information or help from another farmer in the past year. Ten out of the 25 participants described co-

[17] When I was conducting the interviews in early 2008, the Canadian Organic Regime, the national organic standard had not yet come through. Many of the producers (including myself at the time) didn't understand that the word organic in BC was not going to be protected by law. There is no protection under the current standards against this type of fraud.

operative marketing arrangements where byb they sold each other's products at their farm stands, shared delivery duties, or farmed on the same property. There is an example in our small sample of three greenhouse operations (small, medium and large) that cited each other as inspiring the other. Farm 32 is a second generation farm that is now completely surrounded by suburbs. They were among the first in the area to adopt hydroponic growing methods as taught to them by the agricultural extension agent in the mid 1980s. Farm 60 visited this farm and received encouragement and support to start up a similar operation. Farm 27 saw farm 60's hydroponic operation/direct farm marketing model working really well and made a large investment to start up a similar operation but more diversified and on a much larger scale.

All of the farmers mentioned membership in farming organizations, although since participants were selected through publications from their member organizations (COABC, SVIDFMA), this is not surprising. All the farmers mentioned other farmers in the area during our conversation, which demonstrates awareness, group cohesion and dense networks. DeLind and Bingen (2005) elaborate on the role of place and interdependence in civic agriculture. "Place-based" values work to build relationships around food. Cooperation is a natural progression in food production that can be enhanced by the interdependence of the agricultural sectors.

> "People come to rely on me for information about food and food production. I enjoy the social aspect." Int 11

Community Stratification

The majority of farmers in our survey were conflicted about the price of food, their farm's viability and their role as food providers in the larger global food system. It was here again that I noticed a trend toward a divide between the organic producers and the conventional producers. The organic producers were charging (or were trying to charge) prices to recover their costs of production whereas the conventional producers were more likely to charge less and find other means to recover their costs, e.g. higher volume, lower marketing costs. I can infer that since the organic producers have been in business for a shorter period (9.5 years vs. 20 years), their costs of production are fresh in their minds whereas the second-generation farmers may have amortized many costs. On the other hand, higher prices are the culture of organic. The organic movement has always emphasized the value of chemical free production that builds soil quality and animal health (Clarke, 2008). Ironically, many of the farmers in our study have always been attentive to stewardship on their farms but haven't been indoctrinated by the organic ethic of charging more for their food. I can imagine they must feel conflicted about their organic counterparts.

The second generation farmers may also have long-term customer loyalty that began when the costs of production were a lot lower.

> "I know I could sell my berries for $4 or even $5 a pound but then old Mrs. Harvey has been coming here for so long. A move like that would be beyond her means, and I couldn't do that." (Int. 58)

This quote shows the historically embedded relations in direct farm marketing and the complexity behind selecting price points. Again, the world market is acting as a reference point that some farmers are measuring themselves against (Maxey, 2006).

An organic farmer stated her case for higher prices very bluntly:

> "The government should be giving people money to buy food, and not be subsidizing farmers. Millions of taxpayers' dollars line the pockets of agri-business tycoons while I am criticized for charging prices that recover my cost of production?! These same agri-businesses that pollute our lands and waters and manufacture low-grade crappy food! We need to rise up and make our government re-prioritize before we lose all of our family farmers who care so deeply about the food system." (Int. 13)

More statements about pricing and food for low-income recipients:

> "If anyone mentions the high price of the food, or motions like they might have trouble paying, I always offer them the option of coming out to the farm and trading a morning's work for a bag of food. In my whole ten years of coming to the market, I've only had one or two people take me up on my offer, and then they only came out a handful of times." (Int. 1)

> "It's harder than you think to donate a box of fresh vegetables to a family in need. Most people genuinely in need don't have a proper kitchen or the knowhow to prepare whole vegetables. Most soup kitchens and shelters won't take fresh veggies because they use mixes and canned goods for their meals. Food banks will only take fresh items on certain days, never on a market day when you've got the leftovers in town ready to deliver." (Int. 83)

> "We've recently made a great relationship with The Native Friendship Centre. They have an instructional kitchen where they teach folks to cook, and they also have a soup kitchen." (Int. 13)

> "I used to really struggle with charging the prices I need to pay my bills. I want everyone to eat my food." (Int. 57)

Several farmers in the study mentioned participating in a Ministry of Health coupon project where low-income people received coupons to buy fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. They coupons were coupled with cooking classes that featured seasonal ingredients. The farmers were very enthusiastic about the program because they felt their food was feeding people who really needed the nutrition, and they felt the diversity of the low-income people at

the market was a welcome change. Initiatives like this are proving effective at reducing the class stratification with regard to access to local food. (Pothukuchi, 2005).

Scale

Most of the farms on the Saanich Peninsula are physically small because of the confining geography and urban sprawl. This said, because of the proximity to wealthy urban markets, and because of the mild climate that allows year round production, some small farms have risen in stature to become higher grossing farms.

The farmers in our study were well aware that the prices they could charge had some relation to the global market. Most of the organic producers set their prices higher than the global market in an attempt to recover the price of production, but the grocery store price is always a point of reference. Hinrichs (2000) elaborates on the commodity relations that tie local to the global, and the small to the corporate farms.

> "At our farmers' market we have what we call a market analysis that helps us gauge our prices. A farmer will go around to all the grocery stores several times in a season and track the prices of goods sold. This comes back to the farmers and we come to consensus about a good range for prices that reflect value for the customers but also the amount of work that goes into producing each crop. For instance carrots will never match the grocery store price because they are very labour intensive for the small farmer, but lettuces and salad greens can come pretty close (to grocery store prices). Farmers take this information and base their prices on what make sense to them. In this way, competition at the market gets reduced because we're respecting each other's labour. Also, the market analysis gives us a foundation to work with when we're convincing a newbie or a backyard grower not to undercut us." (Int. 14)

> "You watch the prices in the grocery store. Lettuces will hover under 2 bucks all summer and then come October, November when the BC supply runs out…wham…up to 2 bucks and more. Same with everything. So even if local isn't selling so much, the fact that we have some local stock is keeping the distributors from California honest for most of the year. When our local stuff dries up, we're held hostage to whatever the market will bear. That what I see as the value of local…" (Int. 49)

The global market price is also a consideration for consumers. Farmers in our survey talked about customers' expectations that if food comes directly from the farm it should be cheap. If the customer forgoes the convenience of the grocery store and goes directly to the farm, they are entitled to abundant food at a very low price.

The farmers in our study were aware that their comparative advantage was flexibility and their ability to adapt to trends (Goodman and Goodman, 2007). Some stated that they gained advantage by sharing information with other farmers, and by playing close attention to their customers' preferences.

> "We've got to stay one step ahead…always looking for new ways to seduce our chefs. In the early 90s I took a trip to Marin county (just south of San Francisco) to Chez Panisse (the restaurant that made local cusine famous). I brought home all sorts of food trends before anyone here had seen them: mesclun greens, heirloom tomatoes, and golden beets. Now, 20 years later, the market is literally saturated with these because the seed industry developed stock for the big guys (corporate farms). But there are always new opportunities to rediscover, to do things differently and to wow the chefs. I love this part of farming." (Int. 10)

This farmer is an example of how small farms are adapting to or helping shape food trends. Jaroz (2008) offers insight into the effects of having "the city in the country" with urban agriculture. Farmers have a fast feedback loop with urban consumers and can respond with innovative produc to capture new niches. Varied mixes of small greens were formerly a product that could only be produced on a small farm because of the labour intensive nature, the short shelf life and the attent

to detail it required. Once small farmers built the demand for this product, the large corporate farr began the innovation necessary to grow mixed baby greens on a larger scale. Heirloom fruits and vegetables are also more widely available thanks to small farms who re-introduced the seed stock and proved them financially viable. The alternative and diversified farmers in our survey demonstrated the greatest adaptability: working very marginal farmland, taking risks and making investments in order to build markets where there were none and to exploit innovative niches.

Food security

Were the farms in our survey contributing to food security? A local farmer writing for a farmer journal stated while we may have "some fruit and vegetable security" we are lacking meat, grain a dairy security (Marr 2009).

> "I get so tired of people saying we don't have the supply, we can't get local. If you build it, they will come. We need every public institution in BC required to buy local. There needs to be a steady demand at a reasonable price. Within a few years, you'll have all the production that you budgeted for. What kills the farmer is irregular demand, and volatile prices. Guaranteeing food security could be as simple as that." (Int. 11)

> "Our farm produces 10,000 salad servings a week. That sounds impressive until you calculate that it's 300,000 salad servings per year, not even enough for everyone in Victoria to have a taste." (Int. 11)

> "The meat regulations as they are now are causing more food safety problems than they are preventing. Why do the little guys have to measure up to Wal-Mart standards. We have pride in our operations, the market will take care of those who don't." (Int. 11)

> "I believe the provincial egg and chicken marketing boards would have destroyed organic had it been up to them." (Int. 11)

Farmers stated that regulations, mostly the new meat regulations, and profitability were the main reasons preventing them from maximizing output of meat from their lands.

Farmers who recently started going to the markets reported some favourable gains.

> "I feel like the range of produce that we're offering helps lighten the competition. Does that make sense? In the wholesale world it's just price point price point, but at the market maybe people notice that you've got cheap radishes, but they'll pick up a bag full of other things even if you're not as cheap as your neighbour." (Int. 12)

Viability

"My farm is successfully generating a lot of revenue, just not much profit." (Int. 27)

Among the farms who self-identified as successful with financial and lifestyle goals, some strong patterns emerged with regard to production, farm management and marketing. Firstly, direct farm marketing featured prominently among the farmers in our study. Again this was mostly because direct farm marketers were targeted as a sample population, however, the farmers who were selected from the Certified Organic Association list were also all self-marketing. All of the survey participants were direct marketing a percentage of their production. Fifty percent of the farmers who were interviewed were selling 70% or more of their production on-farm, through farmers markets or through direct marketing schemes to restaurants, grocery stores and other direct-to-customer schemes.

Diversity was another common theme from all the participants with regard to viability. Ninety-two percent of the farms produced three or more distinct commodities.

> "I grow about 30 varieties of vegetables over the season. By the time we add our partners' offerings to the list, we can have over 50 types of fruit and vegetables to offer our chefs, It can be complicated to execute but we've had some software developed for us to help keep everything straight" (Int. 13)

The remaining farms added value their single commodities and made diverse products: cider, vinegars and liqueurs out of apples; saplings, fresh fruit and preserves from orchard trees. Eighty percent of the farms marketed through 2 or more channels which included farm stands, farmers markets, direct sales to retailers and restaurants and CSA programs. Notably, diversity across the sectors of food production was limited. Fruit and vegetable farmers were over-represented in our sample because these farmers can succeed with the least intervention and captial. Livestock farmers were hindered by processing regulations (as well as high feed costs). Dairy and egg farmers (almost exclusively in the organic production stream) faced barriers from supply management. The major barrier is access to quota; farmers have to buy access to the market in the form of quota which can be prohibitively expensive and it is illegal to farm these commodities in quantity without it. Grain farmers were limited by lack of infrastructure to harvest, process and transport their product.

In all their marketing, the most viable farmers practiced what we call "retaining value", that is, to closely link their products with their farm name, locale, production methods or origin (as in heirloom seed or heritage breeds). Eighty-eight percent of respondents cited stewardship practices were important in marketing. Ninety-two percent of farmers provided on-farm sales venue, and/or agri-tourism opportunities for the sake of selling

production. Retaining value has been documented in Japan as 'teikei" or "food with the farmer's face on it", and has its origins in the 1970s in the Japanese organic farming movement (JOAA 1993).

Regulation of all forms continues to be a barrier for farm viability, which partially explains why fresh market farmers (fruits and vegetables) are over-represented in our sample as successful thriving businesses, and livestock farmers are under-represented and experiencing impossible regulatory environments. Meat, dairy and eggs are scrutinized under different regulatory bodies (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, BC Centre for Disease Control, B.C Ministry of Agriculture, Vancouver Island Health Authority) and present huge logistical and financial barriers for small farmers. Grain farmers and value-added farmers are under represented as well because our region lacks the infrastructure to handle, transport and process agricultural commodities.

While in most cases, this next strategy was more luck than intention but avoidance of conflict with neighbours had a high impact on viability, not just because it cost time and money to deal with the conflict, but because maintaining good relations enabled farmers to push the boundaries within restrictive municipal zoning.

> "We have neighbours looking over the farm from all sides. Most are great but there's a few who hate the farm and make my life hard. I'm always thinking about them when I make decisions. I just don't even think about doing things that they'd disapprove of because I don't want to give them a reason to come over here." (Int. 8)

Several farmers commented that their municipal by-law enforcement process is complaint-driven. Regulators are very permissive of by-law infractions until there is a complaint, at which point they shut down the illegal activity. Most farms cited highly

visible signage locations as coveted but usually illegal because of traffic visibility issues. If neighbours were on-side with their marketing operations and supported small by-law breaches, it could make a big difference to their ability to attract traffic. Thirty six percent of farmers surveyed spent time and/or money dealing with neighbour complaints. Of these farmers: 56% changed farming activities, 33% installed vegetative barriers, 22% participated in agricultural awareness or environmental conservation efforts to improve their image to the community. There was an average expenditure of 240 hours and $6,560 in the past year dealing with neighbour complaints. This is a serious threat to viability but also to the social fabric within which farmers operate. When community factions develop, against farmers, it makes farmers truly reconsider whether they want to be in operation.

Finally, a fiscally conservative outlook was a favourable attribute for success and viability on the farm. The most successful farms in our study had started small and slowly reinvested profits over time until the farms had high earning capacity. Their overall performance was that much more pronounced when compared to the least successful farm in our survey that had started a large and high volume operation in a short period of time. The operators were overextended from debt load, and were suffering stress and low quality of life as a result. They indicated they would be leaving farming within 5 years. Only 20% of respondents had farm debt . Some farmers stated they were too conservative to take on debt, others were reluctant because they were unsure of return on investment. Land-owning farmers stated it was very easy to borrow money while landless farmers generally lacked access to capital. Complexities arose

with the undercapitalization of new farmers and the start-up limitations that come with lack of funds. I've just learned that one of the new farmers from our survey has stopped farming because managing her cost of living while starting up the farm was too much of a struggle. It is unknown whether the result of her endeavor would have been different had she been better capitalized.

The big question then: are there farms on the Saanich Peninsula that are viable? Can they stand on their own and can they thrive? Yes, there are some very viable, first and second generation farms that are making it work. Unfortunately, there is no clear formula about how to accomplish farm viability. After a careful analysis of viability as it pertains to the farmers in the study, I've come to the conclusion that the term is not absolute, but is highly contextual. There are so many variables that contribute to its context-specific nature. Simply stated: viability is different for different farmers at different times.

What follows is an analysis of the viability of the four types of farms from the earlier analysis section: First generation niche oriented, second generation, alternative/diversified and second career.

First Generation Niche- Oriented

It is difficult to interpret the results from this cluster. They reported being the most satisfied with their farm income yet their debt load as a group is so large that it is

possible that they will not recoup their costs of production. Perhaps they are as happy as can be under the circumstances of impossible economics? It is difficult to understand their satisfaction in such a hard situation. One of three farms indicated they would be stopping farming in the next five years because of financial pressure.

This group is the least resilient because of their debt load and their limited experience. Two of three operations "hit the ground running." They literally had to learn the art and science of farming while running their businesses. Compared to the intergenerational knowledge of the second-generation farmers, we can see they are at a disadvantage. This group also doesn't have the diversity of the alternative and diversified farmers, which buffers against crop loss. Finally, their limited contact with the greater farming community (these were the least involved in farmer organizations and regulatory processes) may lessen their influence on the regulatory environment, which we have seen plays a major role in viability.

Second Generation

They are the least satisfied of all the farmers with their income. They have the least flexibility because of the amount they have invested in the land and the base cost of their production. Their size and industrial output indirectly puts them in a position of competing on the world market.

> "Over the years we've sold to Thrifty's, Safeway and Islands West, but at the end of the day, there was no dollars in it." (Int. 45)

> "People just don't get that we can't compete with farmers in China. We have higher taxes, higher labour costs, higher regulations…higher everything. It's not about our skill as farmers." (Int. 25)

The market for direct-to-customer sales is not consistently big enough for some products. That said, the farmers in our survey have demonstrated flexibility by engaging in direct marketing and channeling their produce into diverse networks. They are struggling with the new paradigm where old truths no longer hold. They came of age in a market scenario where big was always better, where price was the only thing that mattered, where production practices weren't questioned. This is all changing and they are adapting.

> "There's definitely a market for high quality products. But it's not a big market…that's our problem." (Int. 32)

This group is the most resilient of all the farmers because they have the largest number of farm operators (average of 1.5 but I feel that this category of farms didn't truly acknowledge its female operators, so I would guess it's closer to 3), lots of experience and farming skill and a relatively low debt load. At the same time, it's the group least content with their income. Interestingly, it is these farms that are most closely adhering to Canadian agriculture policy, so it is notable that they are the least content but most compliant.

Alternative and Diversified Farmers

The market is opening up for alternative and diversified farmers. This doesn't mean that money is easy but rather that a viable business is possible providing that the farmer can navigate the market correctly and fill a niche. The market is desperate for authenticity, consistent high quality and for farmers who have pride in their production. If a farmer can connect with customers one-on-one and on these terms, they have a willing market in the Victoria region.

Despite many of these operations being under-capitalized, and possibly not having the resources to fortify themselves against shocks, I feel this category of farms is fairly resilient because of their diversity. They are not carrying debt and they are not enrolled in any commodity sector that demands specialization. I would predict that these are the farmers who could most easily adapt to challenges and keep farming. They can't match the resilience of the second-generation farmers because they are lacking the number of operators and the accumulated infrastructure, but they have flexibility on their side.

Second Career Farmers

Some second career farmers are misrepresented by the title "retirement" or "hobby" farm. The farmers we surveyed were clearly creating a second career for themselves out of agriculture. They were the least diversified of all the farms, tending to focus on a single crop or commodity. While they are the least resilient as farmers, having the fewest farm operators, and the least diversity, they are fortified with savings from their

past careers. Evidence of their access to capital is seen with the appropriate level of investment in their farms to make them more efficient and, in some cases, more profitable that the alternative and diversified farms.

These farmers tended to be in a more privileged position that the other farmers in the survey, having more wealth, and social status, or both. Their entrepreneurial position in the agricultural sector made them ideal candidates for advocacy. The majority of these farmers have successfully pressed for policy changes to help the entire sector.

CONCLUSION

Small, local and direct marketing farms on the Saanich Peninsula show greater resilience and viability when compared to the general farming population. Possibly 30% of the farms in our study would be deemed financially viable using conventional business evaluation criteria. Almost all the rest are viable running year to year, but their businesses alone could never pay for the capital cost of setting up the farm (especially considering current real estate prices). It is important here to note the distinction between end product and productivity. By looking only at the numbers, the overall impact of the food production process can be missed (Dahlberg, 2001). The farmers in our survey who were most successful have been able to decouple their prices from the world market and to provide their customers with a sense of value that is beyond what the world market can offer.

Significant challenges remain in navigating the regulatory environment, in dealing with lack of infrastructure and in handling urban-rural encroachment. These issues all hinder the potential of local food systems and the viability of farms. Small farms are being forced into regulatory models to deal with food safety concerns that are inappropriate for their scale and this is hampering their potential. These are issues of concern for food security and farm viability and they require further analysis because as it currently stands, meat, dairy and egg production are marginalized activities because of largely unachievable standards and regulatory requirements.

I believe the problems that we are experiencing with the food systems and farm viability stem from our refusal to acknowledge the cost of food production. This is both on the farmers' part and on the consumer's part. Farmers in our study were often so apologetic about the price of their food that it was impossible to get a true accounting of their costs. Maxey (2006) explains that alternative and organic food movements have been built up around a resistance to the global food system. Yet many of the farmers in our study mentioned that the world market was always a reference point in their pricing.

There is a need for a fundamental change in how food and food production is valued. Miguel Alteri's (1999) energy accounting with regard to farming systems (some types of traditional agriculture that yield 11 calories for every calorie spent, whereas an average agri-business operation spends 27 calories for every calorie generated) demonstrates that our dominant food production system is some 300 times less efficient than its traditional counterparts. The time for this expensive type of agriculture has ended. The answer to this situation may be to re-create our communities and landscapes with a focus on enabling food production.

Local farming practices may be just as harmful as any industrial farm, but they can have the potential to have a much lower burden, if not a positive environmental contribution to the environment. The true comparative advantage of local food is looking at food production from a long-term and sustainability lens. Local food, from small, direct marketing operations, over the long term, is much" cheaper" in a full cost social and ecological accounting framework and can be more stable because the food production is in the hands of many instead of in the hands of very few corporations. In addition, the infusion of jobs and industry to the regions involved with food production could create opportunities for prosperity, rather than being a net draw of wealth as it currently stands with food coming from far away. As I saw from this study, the financial picture from small, local, direct marketing farms ranges from bleak to promising and the return on investment is very modest. The argument could be made that local food is not expensive enough. The challenge, therefore, is to channel the cost savings from local producers back to them.

Can small, local and/or organic farms have a role to play in feeding the world? Yes, they currently play a major role in the global south, and they can and must have a greater role in food provisioning here in Canada . The farms in our survey demonstrated that a high level of productivity that can be achieved from small plot agriculture in this ecosystem. The real economics behind small, local and direct marketing farms are sobering. Low return on investment, and low or no profit margins was the reality facing most survey participants. On the plus side, direct marketing farmers are more buffered from volatile markets because of the relationships they have built with their consumers.

All the farmers in our survey reported having a loyal clientele, some had waiting lists and line-ups at the farmers' market. The embedded community ties that the farmers in our survey fostered were the strongest indicator of continued long-term success. If the farmers can enlist the support of their community, financially and politically, they have a better chance of overcoming the challenges of financial viability and regulatory pressure.

To answer the question "How are [or can] local farmers making it work", I feel that the farms in the study were making it work through sheer determination, regardless of the market. It is the food system itself that is not working. If mechanisms were in place to correct distortions in the marketplace, and regulatory frameworks were corrected so they were not actively hindering farmers, I believe farmers would realize a more attractive return on their investment. The inspiring part of this question to me is, that if farms are working relatively well now, with all the barriers in place, what would happen if farmers were fully enabled? If farming became more profitable, so many of the problems with food production would simply disappear. Farming could compete with other land uses, and there may not be so much pressure to cut corners with environmental stewardship and care of farm labour. The farming population would grow, and the average age of farmers would come down as more people were drawn into the sector. The farmers in our study demonstrated the productive potential of the land, and innovation in farming practices. It is time that their efforts be recognized and rewarded with fair compensation.

Appendix A

The CFIA Definition

"Local", "locally Grown", and any substantially similar term shall mean that the domestic goods being advertised originated within 50 km of the place where they are sold, measured directly, point to point, or meets the requirements of section B.01.012 of the Food and Drug Regulations, whichever condition is least restrictive.

B.01.012....."local food" means a food that is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged in a local government unit and sold only in

a) the local government unit in which it is manufactured, processed or packaged,
b) one or more local government units that are immediately adjacent to the one in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged, or
c) the local government unit in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged and in one or more local government units that are immediately adjacent to the one in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged

It should be noted in this regard that other terms such as "Product of Nova Scotia", "Foodland Ontario", "Buy BC", or "Quebec Vrai," etc. may be used to describe fresh produce which is produced and grown within a province but which does not meet the criteria for "local".

(CFIA 2008)

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