

Commodified Tastes: The Narratives Supporting Consumer Purchase of Organics

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2009

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in the Department of Sociology

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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The booming organic food industry has led to an increased complexity in the way in which organic foods are marketed. Consumers now encounter a multitude of reasons for why they should (or should not) purchase organic foods. This research examines the promotion of organic food from four different food companies (three grocery stores and a food delivery program) as a way to uncover the narratives used to describe and endorse organic food. With an analysis of website and in-store content from chain, organic and local companies, I have used previous research in the area of organic food discourse to identify themes within the selected content. This study concludes that while there are important commonalities among the narratives, it is not the organic food itself that these commonalities stem from, but rather the company context (company goals and values) that frame the promotional narratives.

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## Introduction

Although food is one of the most elemental requirements for human life, the place and complexity of food in society extends much further than this. Instead of recognizing the cultural element of our food practices, food consumption is often viewed as the result of a need to eat and survive. Yet food extends much beyond the realm of the physical and into the social, emotional, and personal. Deborah Barndt (2008) describes this food intimacy well when she states, “...as an “intimate commodity”, food touches our bodies as well as our minds and hearts and finds its way into our stomachs as well as our stories; as a border-crossing market commodity, it leaves a trail that offers clues to broader economic ecological, political, and cultural processes” (p. 2). Thus, as a commodity which affects more than just our physical bodies, we may see food go beyond sustenance and become something more – especially within the realm of organic foods.

In the face of the increasingly complex array of food choices and the value-laden and political underpinnings inherent in food choice, consumers are consistently asking the question, “*should I buy organic food?*”. Somewhere within the process of sifting through the information available on organics, comparing prices and labels, analyzing their own lifestyle choices, and applying all of the above to their daily eating habits, consumers soon come to realize that this seemingly simple question uproots a bevy of answers<sup>1</sup>. Why have organics become so pervasive in society? Is it possible that we are on the cusp of a food revolution? What factors have led to their intense popularity and increasing domination of the natural food market? The complexities that lie within these questions are centered in food ideologies and the consumption of ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> I am citing previous research I conducted and presented through the University of British Columbia Okanagan on consumer food choice and perceptions of organic and convenience foods. See footnote 17 on page 33 for full explanation of the research.

When taking into consideration the fact that the observation of our food consumption patterns can reveal many things about food culture and society at large, it becomes important to bring recognition to these practices and understand how they can contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural phenomena.

It is clear within the literature on organic food that academics, writers and “experts” often argue that as a result of mass production and the industrialization of the food industry consumers are no longer tied to their food as they once were: that there is a need to “remove the veil” (Eden, 2011). They view consumers as in need of education and a connection to their food. While this notion runs through a majority of the literature on organic food and consumption practices I avoid reference to consumers as culturally inept with regard to food and “what’s *really* going on”. While I think that there is some merit in the idea that consumers are unaware of the origins of their food sources, I also think that consumers are often more educated on the issues and critical in their food choice than they are given credit for within some of the scholarly work on the topic of food. The very complexity of the decisions we face as consumers in today’s food marketplace is best described by Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence and Mummery (2002), when they state:

Consumers are not faced with a simple choice between right and wrong - between good, healthy, environmentally friendly organic food and bad, unhealthy, environmentally destructive conventional food. Rather, *they are faced with a dazzling array of competing discourses* on food, nutrition, environment etc, together with an equally dazzling array of competing desires, preferences, anxieties and beliefs, as well as the rather practical issues of availability, convenience and cost. (italics mine, 37)

Thus, despite consumers’ best efforts to be educated and aware of their food choices, the very complexity of the market makes this effort seem somewhat futile. This phenomenon begs the question, how are consumers to make their food choices when there are so many available

options? Or, more specific to this research, what *are* these ‘discourses’ and how are they significant? It is with these questions in mind that I analyze supermarket discourse(s)<sup>2</sup> on organics.

This thesis presents an analysis of how organic food is marketed to consumers. Through a qualitative analysis of promotional material offered by a variety of grocery stores (chain, local, organic), I have uncovered the ways in which food stores have chosen to promote organic foods and the “organic philosophy” (Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006, 3) to consumers. I have aimed to understand the multiple ways in which organic foods can be marketed and how they are produced and circulated by national chain stores and local food companies. In short, I looked to discover *which* of the multiple reasons to consume organic foods grocery stores use the most in the promotion of organic foods, how they are significant, and how the themes compare – both in their connections with each other and in their use by certain food stores.

In my research, I identify eleven significant themes in food store organic promotional literature. These themes include: “community”, “individual choice”, “cost”, “health”, “education and information”, “authenticity and legitimacy”, “safety”, “simplicity/return to nature”, “taste”, and “consumer behaviour”. The following analysis of the company website content and in-store promotional materials reveals some insight into the advertising of organic foods. The companies selected provide a varied landscape within which organic foods are marketed differently based on company values, available organic and local foods, clientele, and a variety of other factors. While many of the themes that I have identified overlap and connect in multiple ways, there are also some significant differences between the food stores and how they will frame their

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “supermarket discourse” loosely, as Saanich Organics is not a supermarket and I will not specifically be using “discourse analysis” as a methodology.

discussions of organic food. These similarities and differences are what make this research important, and I will further explore them towards the end of this thesis. While this research does not allow me to go beyond what the website and in-store content will allow, I am able to take a glimpse into the wide variety of discourses attached to the promotion of organic foods. What I found surprised me. In fact, the specifics and minute details relating to organic food and the way in which it was marketed based on these details became less and less important throughout my analysis of the content. In fact, what I found was that *it is the context that's important*. While the health benefits, cost, appearance, and so forth, of organic food is important in its promotion, a look at the interactions between all of the themes used to discuss organics actually portrays more about the values of the company discussing the food than it does about the food itself.

## **My Journey with Organic Food**

For me, the importance of studying food within a sociological context became clear through a process of academic exposure in addition to my recognition of the cultural value of food. In my first exposure to the area in an academic sense, through a class specifically on the sociology of food, I knew right away that it was a topic of great interest to me. It seemed so cutting-edge to my young sociological mind, and yet so obvious – as sociologists, how could we *not* examine food? Upon a review of the literature on food culture, Ian Cook et al. (2006) argues this very point: “[t]here’s a core argument in [the] literature that food can tell us about anything and everything. It’s simultaneously molecular, bodily, social, economic, cultural, global, political, environmental, physical, and human geography” (p. 656). What seemed to be the most mundane element of everyday life is also that which is the central element of so much social life!

Reading Marion Nestle's (2003) *Food Politics* furthered that connection – extending my interest in food beyond the social and into the political and economic. I was beginning to recognize how entangled we were in a web of complexities that centered on the very thing that we can't live without – food. As both sustenance for our bodies as well as fuel for our minds and social appetites, food became the center of my sociological thought.

Conducting my own research in an undergraduate project<sup>3</sup> and continuing along the path towards a better understanding of our connections with food, I saw topics of interest all around me. In everyday conversations, in a bookstore, on the TV – all indicated that organic food was a topic that captured a lot of public interest. In this way, it was unavoidable. As a sociologist, I have always been drawn to topics that everyone can talk about – that are on the forefront of the public mind. I like the idea that something can seem so common and so much a part of everyday life and conversation, while at the same time, reveal so much about our social lives. As Berger (1963) suggests, the sociological perspective encourages a closer look at what we would deem the “mundane”: we must look for the “strange in the familiar”. While the perspective of organic food changes as it becomes an increasingly larger part of the world of food, I would argue that a study of organics of this nature will reveal what is strange in what has now become the familiar.

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<sup>3</sup> This research has been included in the discussion of the consumer definition of organic. See footnote 17 on page 33.

## **Chapter 1: Situating the Movement: Putting Organics in Context**

### **The Organic Movement**

In the past several decades, a heightened awareness of what is contained within the food we put into our bodies has led to a focus on organic foods and products. A variety of books, media and retailers have encouraged a change in the food market. Fear of the consequences of the globalized food market has promoted the growth of both local and organic food production and sales. As a sort of back-to-basics effort, a number of consumers have looked to become more aware of the origins of their food. Qazi and Selfa (2005) put it best when they state: “[t]he litany of environmental degradation, disempowerment of farmers, health effects of high chemical inputs, erosion of rural communities, and economic woes of family farmers, is promoting some to rethink the farmer-consumer connection” (46). Organic food has thus been deemed by some to be a part of the solution to their food concerns.

In fact, growth within this area of the food market has been deemed “remarkable” (Pieniak, Aertsens, & Verbeke, 2010). According to the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC), retail sales within the organic food industry have surpassed \$1 billion in Canada alone (last numbers tallied by the OACC taken in 2006 and published in 2007) (OACC, 2007). This specific area of the food industry has seen unprecedented growth of up to 20% per year in Canada and is still increasing. More specifically, the most growth in sales of organic food is actually taking place within mainstream food markets, while the percentage of purchase at traditional organic food locations (such as farmers markets and natural/organic food stores) is believed to have decreased (OACC, 2007).

While the market for organic foods is increasing nation-wide, growth is concentrated in certain areas. A report conducted by Statistics Canada on organic fruit and vegetable production in Canada in 2005 claimed that British Columbia was a clear “winner” in regard to the production of organic fruits and vegetables (Parsons, 2005). At the time of the report, BC had committed almost 12% (8.7% of vegetable area and 3.2% of fruit area) of all land to specifically organic farming (Parsons, 2005, 4). The OACC (2007) has also claimed that BC consumers purchase more organic foods than do consumers in any other province. Thus, as it is a focal point of the organic food movement in Canada, BC is an ideal place to study organic food production, consumption, and promotion.

The increasing organic food market is certainly not limited to Canada or North America; in fact, it is a worldwide trend. Lockie et al. (2002) predicted towards the beginning of the decade that the end of the decade would herald a great increase in organic food consumption. Specifically, they thought that European consumers could possibly be consuming approximately thirty percent organically-produced foods (Lockie et al., 2002, 23). This prediction may not be far off. According to the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL<sup>4</sup>), in a comparison of both the sale of organic products as well as organic agricultural land, Europe had the highest growth worldwide. In fact, as of 2009, Europe’s organic agricultural land had increased by 12% or 1 million hectares (FiBL, 2011). In addition, the Australian food market has seen organic production double in the years leading up to 2000. Overall, it is hard for farmers, those working in the food industry and consumers alike to ignore the fast growing and world-wide organic

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<sup>4</sup> The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture is referred to using the original Swiss acronym FiBL for *Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau*. Originally founded in 1973 in Switzerland, the FiBL recently became an international association as of 2010 and supports the development of organic agriculture worldwide.

trend. And, as Hughner et al. (2007) argue, “[g]iven the rapid and accelerating growth of the organic food market, an assessment of organic food ... seems imperative” (2).

Organic foods, while currently produced at a much higher rate and in a much different way than they once were, have a notably alternative history. The term organic in relation to food and farming dates back at least seventy years. While the origin of the term organic (at least within this context) is not discussed often, Paull (2006) argues that it can be traced back to a book published in 1940 by Lord Northbourne – an agriculturist at Oxford University – entitled “Look to the Land” (Paull, 2006; Rigby & Cáceres, 2001). His understanding of the farm as a functioning organism led to his use of the term “organic farming”. Northbourne felt that the term not only exemplified how a farm should run as a whole, but his view that a farm must be organic in the sense that it is holistic or “not chemical” (Paull, 2006). Now the term organic has stretched far beyond Northbourne’s original interpretation, while still carrying with it his initial value of a non-chemical approach to growing food and sometimes of the small farm practice.

As the food market increases in complexity, and organic foods spread to new regions and are produced in new ways, the definition of organic also becomes more complex. While the definition of organic as defined by certification boards and governing bodies may be one thing, the consumer definition of the same term may in fact be something completely different. In a previous study<sup>5</sup> I conducted on organic and convenience foods and consumer food choice, I asked participants how they would define organic. As the sampling for the study required no more than that the participant made some (or all) of the food choices for their household and was an adult, education or information on specific foods such as organics varied amongst the group.

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<sup>5</sup> *Organic versus Junk? The Implications of the Food Choices We Make* (Osborne, 2008). See footnote 17 on pg. 33..

Some consumers stated that they had no idea how to define organic, but that they would purchase these foods as they seemed “healthier”. Others were well versed on the topic of organic foods and had strong opinions on whether or not they would purchase them (they listed reasons such as cost, personal health benefit, moral/social responsibility, and so forth). Whether or not the participant claimed to have knowledge of what organic foods were the general consensus was that they contained no chemicals. This was the basic definition given for organic food by the group of participants.

In her article on consumer perception of organic and “functional” foods and the role of food labels, Eden (2011) argues that there seems to be two separate definitions or perceptions of organic. On one hand, organic is tied to regulation: food production practices, types of farming, allowable fertilizers, and so forth tie organic - on the production side – to concern for animal welfare and the environment (Eden, 2011, 185). On the other hand, from the consumer perspective, the term organic is tied to more personal effects, such as health or taste. Eden’s (2011) use of focus groups to discuss food labelling confirmed this duality. She saw that consumers separated out organic foods by identifying them as “fruit and vegetables, as raw food that was natural and unadulterated” (Eden, 2011, 185). Rather identifying organic foods through their production practices and farming-related elements, as would be tied to production, the consumers in Eden’s (2011) study identified organic foods as those which are “untouched” or outside of methods of mass production.

This perceived contention between notions of mass-produced or “mainstream” foods in opposition with locally grown “natural” foods has very much been a part of the history of organic food. The organic food movement has long since been considered an *alternative* food movement. Much like vegetarianism or veganism, organic foods have been seen as outside the

“norm”. Presumably, the average consumer purchases that which is offered in most grocery stores. At one point, organic foods would not have been included as a choice. Thus, organic foods have been viewed as “alternative”. Yet, those who study the growth of the organic food industry have drawn a clear line between what organic foods used to be (alternative) and what they now are (possibly less alternative and more mainstream/conventional) (Fonte, 2008; Qazi & Selfa, 2005). Qazi and Selfa (2005) would label organic foods as an “an alternative agro-food network” which is “often characterized as arising out of [a] social movement relat[ing] to the environment, sustainable agriculture, rural social justice or consumer health and safety concerns” (47). However, they acknowledge the difference between organic food production and consumption in the 1970’s, described by one participant in their study as “more religion than business” (Qazi & Selfa, 2005, 48), and the new industry of organic farming. Fonte (2008) echoes this differentiation in that organic food had been seen by the public as the primary alternative to mainstream foods in the 1970s. Her focus on local foods has thus come as a result of a growing dissatisfaction with organic food production and the certification process.

As some have argued, the organic food movement has recently become what might be considered “conventional” (Fonte, 2008). In other words, as a consequence of the growth of the organic industry in recent years, organic foods have become mass produced and commercialized. As a result of this perceived change in the production of organic foods, some have turned to local foods as a way to protest “mainstream” food production (Fonte, 2008). As Qazi and Selfa (2005) argue, “[s]mall-scale farmers and ‘responsible eaters’ ... are looking for alternative ways to participate in a food system, ways that are outside the conventional distribution and marketing system, and that allow for greater local control over food” (46). Fonte (2008) now calls local food “post-organic” as a way of identifying it as the new primary alternative.

Not everyone would agree with Fonte's (2008) "post-organic" argument. Despite the staggering amount of growth occurring in the organic food industry worldwide, many still find that organic products cater to a niche or alternative market. As organic foods are still in the beginning stages of their integration with the mainstream food market as a whole and are differently produced than other foods, consumers often still find them to be "novel" (Bartels & Reinders, 2009). Like exotic fruits and foreign spices, consumers find themselves drawn to new and unfamiliar products, marketed as an experience – a way to travel without ever leaving your home (Cook et al., 2004). In 2005, the New York Times claimed that while the organic food industry could now account for \$12 billion US in sales, it was still a "niche market within the \$500 Billion food industry" in the US (Warner, 2005). But, how much longer will this market remain "niche"? With incredible growth in the organic food market, some are beginning to find that organics are pushing the boundaries of what was previously thought possible:

Organic food products are now no longer the domain only of those who believe in them for reasons of principle, but can be found in all types and scaled of food production and retail: from major supermarkets, to small, independent, and committed producers selling directly to their customers. (Cook, Reed & Twiner, 2009, p. 152)

### **Critical Consumers and Purchasing Power**

The organic food movement has led to hopes that the elimination of pesticides and careful choosing of what passes through our lips will not only benefit consumers in the immediate, but also in the long run. Consumers, Pieniak et al. (2010) argue, feel that the consumption of organic food is the "right" thing to do or is moral/ethical. In addition, some posit that the success of the organic food market can be partially attributed to these foods granting

cultural capital or becoming a “status-maker” (Wallace & Wolf, 2006; Bartels & Reinders, 2009; Cook, Reed & Twiner, 2009; Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Guthman, 2003; Hughner et al., 2007; Lockie et al., 2002; Padel & Foster, 2005; Roseberry, 2005). The “feel good” element to the purchase of foods that seem to better both oneself and one’s environment has become a key element to what appears as a better lifestyle. Some argue that consumers often fall back on the separation of food into “good” and “bad” categories based on their labelling, with scientific-sounding or long and complex words falling into the bad category (even referred to as “rubbish”), and natural or raw looking foods as “good” (Eden, 2011). As Hughner et al.(2007) states “[t]he values of altruism, ecology, universalism, benevolence, spirituality, and self-direction have all been connected to regular consumers of organic foods” (Hughner et al., 2007, pp. 3). The moral or ethical element to organic foods draws individuals looking for more from their foods than simple nutrition.

Considering the growth within the organic food market, market researchers and social scientists alike have wondered, who is the organic consumer? Lockie et al.’s (2002) Australian study included discussions in focus groups as well as information from a national survey on consumer food choice. Their results indicated that organic consumption increases as both income and education level increase and that the organic consumer is more likely to be a woman than a man. Noting that they separated education into the categories of general and science-based, Lockie et al. (2002) conclude that both types of education had the same impact on consumer purchase of organics. Also, while income did have an effect on organic consumption, the relationship was not strong enough, according to Lockie et al. (2002) to warrant the “organic consumer as yuppie stereotype” (31). In other words, the interest in purchasing organics was not

necessarily less for low income groups, but in fact the increased cost of organics became less of an obstacle in their consumption for groups earning a slightly higher income.

Lastly, the authors also noted a strong gender difference in organic consumption habits, with 44% of women claiming to consume certified organics while only 34% of men made the same claim (Lockie et al., 2002). The authors note from their study, and confirm with external research, that this gender difference is likely a result of gendered roles within the family. A focus on the responsibility of women as caretakers and in charge of food selection and preparation seems to connect with the higher number of women choosing certified organic products (Lockie et al., 2002). Thus, the picture of the organic consumer, with the aforementioned research in mind, becomes just a little bit clearer.

Existing in niche market in comparison to “mainstream” foods, organic foods have also been deemed the alternative and thus provide choice for consumers to wish to make a statement with their purchase. Cook, Reed and Twiner (2009) feel that critical consumers see the purchase of specific foods as their way of expressing their identity as well as their political stance and views on the environment and issues of social justice (p. 170). Using their “purchasing power” in their critical consumption of foods, consumers are able to show their support – or lack of – for specific social ideas as portrayed within the idea of justice in fair trade, ecology in shade grown, bird friendly coffee, or individual health in organic vegetables and so on. In the case of organic foods, it is possible to recognize demand as making statements, for example, against over-processed and chemically and genetically modified foods as well as the neoliberal idea that health is an individual consumer responsibility.

Thus choosing organic foods and products – which has also been termed “green buying” (Pieniak et al., 2010) – becomes a notable option in the realm of consumer food purchase. It often extends beyond physical health and the avoidance of unwanted chemicals in food. The choice of organic food is further legitimized by an increase in policy supporting organic farms and organic food certification (Pieniak et al., 2010). Only recently has Canada put a national policy into place in regards to Organic product certification. While the regulations are still relatively new, Canadian food producers are certainly feeling the effects of this newly crafted certification.

While the organic certification process would seem relatively simple (either a product is organically produced or it isn't), it is in fact more complex than most consumers recognize. Products are eligible to become certified organic and may use the word organic on the label as well as the Canadian “Certified Organic” logo if at least 95% of the contents can be verified as organic (Government of Canada, 2009). Of course, this number only applies to food products containing multiple ingredients, in which case only a percentage of those ingredients used in the product (for example, cereal) would need to be organic in order for organic certification to be possible. While multi ingredient products may be certified organic with 95% organic ingredients, products that are 70% organic or more may advertise using the percentage of organic ingredients (using the phrase “contains X% organic ingredients”) (Government of Canada, 2009).

Certification can be granted by a limited number of legitimized third party verifying agencies such as Quality Assurance International (QAI). The standards of these organizations are kept in line by what the Canadian Food Inspection Agency calls Conformity Verification bodies (CFIA, 2011). Most importantly, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has deemed the Canadian national organic standard as equivalent to the regulations of their American counterpart

(the National Organic Program, NOP) so as not to create difficulty in the import/export of organic products between countries (Martin, 2010). Thus the term organic (especially when preceded by “certified”) has even become something of substance, something legitimized – the use of the term now denotes specific food qualities as its use is now restricted. The restriction of specific terms impacts the marketing of food. It requires marketers to find ways to represent uncertified natural or organic foods in creative ways, without using the terms that are used most often.

Knowing very well the effect that the sale of an idea or feeling is just as important as the marketing of a product itself, organic marketing has included “poetic, vague, sensual and “earthy” [language], story-telling and conversational with emotive appeals to a rural idyll and animal welfare” (Cook, Reed & Twiner, 2009, 158). According to Cook, Reed & Twiner (2009), bucolic imagery is often used in the promotion and packaging of organic products as a way to disassociate them from negative images of mass production. The authors also emphasize that this marketing strategy is used by both corporate and independent marketers – it seems to be an industry-wide strategy that is proving successful. There are some within the organic movement that fear that they are witnessing a commodification of the organic ideal.

When a consumer purchases food, their purchase is also of an idea in connection with that food. In this way food is a commodity. Looking back to a simple definition of what creates a commodity, attributed to Marx and central to his critique of the capitalist system, food can be viewed as a commodity if “it is a product intended principally for exchange” (Appadurai, 1986, p. 5). Food prepared for a grocery store is indeed intended for exchange, and with its preparation to be sold it is packaged and readied for a consumer to be informed its uses and its value.

This notion is the key within a study of the organic food movement. In fact, some point out that organic food can often only be identified by their label (Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006; Eden, 2011). Consumers are forced to read and interpret the labels and what they portray about the food in order to make their purchasing decisions (Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006). Eden (2011) argues that the “‘organic’ label simplified a complex set of production standards to a single word on which consumers can act” (186). The label and appearance of the product thus conveys the characteristics of the food contained in hopes that these characteristics will appeal to the consumer. Ian Cook et al.’s<sup>6</sup> (2004) concept of ethical/moral food purchase and consumption requires that each food item be connected to an ideology. Cook et al. (2004) illustrates this notion well in his examination of the fetishized papaya through a closer look at its journey from growth to sale. His article focuses on the creation of the commodified papaya or, in other words, how the papaya transforms from a single fruit in a field of trees to an exotic commodity in a supermarket. Cook et al. (2004) argues in support of geographical knowledges<sup>7</sup> as they are attached to commodities – the commodification of ideas. In the later stages of the commodity chain, Cook et al. (2004) looks at how supermarkets often include a variety of produce from exotic locations, Cook et al. (2004) poses the question: “was the speciality or exotic produce there to make money? Or was it a statement about supermarkets’ global reach and sophistication?” (645).

The motivations and preferences of organic food consumers have been investigated by many, including those within the organic food industry. In 2006, with the assistance of Samuel

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Cook refers to himself in this way purposefully; there is one author credited for this article.

<sup>7</sup> For more on geographical knowledges, see Cook et al.’s collaboration with Philip Crang (2006), *The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement and Geographical Knowledges*; along with its relevance within this analysis on page 65-67.

Bonti-Ankomah, a research economist with Agri-Food Canada, and Emmanuel Yiridoe, an associate professor from Nova Scotia Agricultural College, the OACC produced a fairly comprehensive report on consumer perception of organic food. The report addresses a lot of what is discussed by other authors within the field. With the research coming from a different perspective (that is, not necessarily sociological in nature), the list of reasons why consumers purchase organic food is primarily concerned with internal versus external consumer focus. In other words, consumers choose organic food based on their perception of who their food purchase is for or who should benefit from their purchase. If the consumer has an *internal* focus, their food purchase is more likely to be a result of concern for personal health, cost, or the like (Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006). In contrast, Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006) contest that if a consumer has an *external* focus, a consumer's food purchase may be more of a response to social conditions or societal impact. While I would argue that there is a danger in simplifying consumer choice to this extent and making the choice an either-or situation, Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006) make a good argument. At the very least, this dichotomy of internal or external focus helps to clarify the factors relevant in consumer purchase of organics.

## **Commodified Tastes**

Within the context of both the social and the physical, what seems to be a choice based on solely individual and physical likes and dislikes can transform and become structured within the social. Julie Guthman (2002) argues in favour of this "hybrid" view of taste – "[t]aste, it can be...surmised, is necessarily individual and social, gate-keeping and learned, and neither wholly structured nor wholly chosen" (297/298). In a later article, Guthman (2003) critiques Eric

Schlosser – the author of the hugely popular book *Fast Food Nation* – for his assumption that taste is purely a natural phenomenon. She posits that Schlosser’s argument is simply that fast food tastes good, but Guthman (2003) argues that he doesn’t acknowledge that this development of taste is mediated by cultural and social factors (46). This is mind, the movement towards ethical eating and the consumption of organic products is often seen as juxtaposition to the fast food and convenience eating trend. Guthman (2003) problematizes this simplified division, and instead points towards the complexities and integration of the two gastronomical movements – especially within in the context of cultural tastes.

Of course much of this discussion of taste and the social can be traced back to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) discussion of distinction and social tastes. While Bourdieu (1984) does not discuss taste with specific regard to *organic* food, his analysis of taste (especially in regard to food) can certainly apply. In specific reference to food, Bourdieu (1984) discusses the factors of income and taste. On the surface, he argues, it would seem that as the income and social status of an individual rises, so does their purchase of more nutritional, non-fattening foods. In contrast, the purchase of the cheaper alternative of filling, fattening foods decreases. While this would seem to explain the majority of food purchase, there are still cases that cannot be explained using this effect. Thus, Bourdieu (1984) turns to taste. Taste, for Bourdieu, is the “practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” (as cited in Schor & Holt, 2000, 205). He argues that taste is an indicator of a person’s general social position as it points towards the values – and the products and practices that portray those values – a person in a given social position would be expected to engender. In his discussion of class distinction, Bourdieu (1984) makes the connections between class, perceived difference, and consumption, while keeping in mind the significant symbolic nature of the consumption of goods. Their distinctive nature through symbolism, he argues,

“represent[s that] which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties [which] is an integral part of social reality” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 483). In this way, taste is a large part in the process of distinction, or the differentiation between groups within a society.

In his specific discussion of food and taste, Bourdieu (1984) continues on to define two types of taste: the taste of necessity and the taste of luxury. While the latter is one which is the result of the possession of capital and the capitalist *freedom* to choose - to put it in Marxist terms, which Bourdieu (1984) also uses, the taste of the bourgeoisie - the former is that which results from the “necessity of reproducing labour power at the lowest cost which is forced on the proletariat as its very definition” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 177). Thus, in light of Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of taste, the concept becomes so much deeper.

Cultural capital is also a large part of Bourdieu’s (1984) use of taste. It is the sort of currency, Bourdieu (1984) claims, which we can exchange for either economic or social capital (or sometimes both), and thus a higher social position. For example, parents who are middle or upper class may be able to pass cultural capital to their child in the form of language or custom that can allow them to be successful in university and/or a future career. In contrast, a working class family may not be able to pass along those same cultural competencies to their child; allowing for less educational or future career success. The cultural capital<sup>8</sup> of an individual can in fact play a large role in the creation of their tastes. In this way, taste is in fact a part of one’s cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) connects these notions through the production - and

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<sup>8</sup> Cultural capital differs from social capital in that while social capital involves control of relationships and social connections (including power and influence through networks), cultural capital is gained through socialization and provides individuals with privilege gained through tastes, perceptions and education (Wallace & Wolf, 2006).

consumption - of goods. After explaining the co-dependent relationship between taste and the production of goods, Bourdieu (1984) posits:

The producers [of goods] are led by the logic of competition with other producers and by the specific interests linked to their position in the field of production (and therefore by the habitus which has led them to that position) to produce distinct products which meet the different cultural interests which the consumers owe to their class conditions and position, thereby offering them a real possibility of being satisfied. (p. 231)

Bourdieu (1984) thus concludes from this that the social class of the producers, influenced by their cultural capital (and of course, habitus), influences taste in an inverse way. The production of goods meant to satisfy individuals within various societal positions simultaneously affects the taste of individuals. Bourdieu's (1984) insights into taste showcase the important "give and take" relationship between production and consumption and the creation of desire for certain products that is a large part of the organic food movement. How are our tastes created? How much "individuality" is in our choice of which foods to purchase?

In a marketing sense, taste sells. The idea that a product "tastes better" than another goes beyond the economic, moral and practical reasons for buying food. Taste is seen as a quality that might reach consumers more than alternative environmental and health-based arguments for the consumption of organic food (Cook, Reed & Twiner, 2009). It appears as something that is unarguable; as if taste can be compared on a measurable scale and could be agreed upon by all who consume a specific food item. Yet, going back to Guthman's (2002) argument, if taste is composed of both 'natural' *and* social factors than we can assume that this marketing of organic "taste" is also structured by/within social factors. For Guthman (2002), taste conjures up two notions, "that of yumminess and that of highly classed and gendered forms of social control" (295). Guthman (2002) thus adds to the social aspect of taste in acknowledging that it is not only physical, but also a part of social control. The word taste, in this form, serves a reminder of the

duality of the word meaning and the reality of how taste is constructed. Cook, Reed & Twiner (2009) conclude from this use of “tastiness” within marketing that as it is a “*subjective quality*, [thus] it is less refutable than health or environmental claims, and is thus a ‘safer bet’” (p. 164).

This claim of taste may also be a safer bet for consumers, as it is widely accepted to choose a food item because of its taste, and thus express identity. It also requires less justification on behalf of the consumer than would the choice of a food product for moral/ethical/environmental reasons. Thus, marketing organic foods based on better taste<sup>9</sup> becomes a more attainable selling point as there are no set objective standards for claims on taste, and thus plenty of opportunities for individuals to express their own preferences in terms of taste, including of course opportunities for the display of ‘good taste’.

### **But, What about Cost?<sup>10</sup>**

One of the major factors that can often be pushed to the side when discussing organic foods is cost. Undeniably, any product (food or otherwise) with the word organic affixed to it often comes with a higher price tag (Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006; Fonte, 2008). Fonte (2008) even argues that products with an organic label are increasingly aimed at consumers “with a high disposable income” (p. 204). Cost can sometimes play a larger role than other

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the Canadian national organic standards state: “Organically produced food cannot be distinguished visually from conventionally produced food and cannot necessarily be distinguished by taste; therefore, consumers rely on labels, other advertising tools for product information and certification to ensure the organic claims are true”. (Government of Canada, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> While I understand that the economic part of this analysis is much larger than the small part I will address with relation to organic foods, I do still want to address it as it is a major theme throughout the literature as well as in the content I analyzed.

factors when it overtakes a consumer's ability to afford a given item or compare two food items, all things being equal. Lancaster (as cited in Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe, 2006) portrays goods as a "collection of characteristics" rather than just an abstract item (p. 7). He argues that a consumer buys a particular good because it embodies a certain set of characteristics that are valued by the consumer. What makes Lancaster's argument different from others is that he seems to put less of an emphasis on price, arguing that regardless of price, a consumer will not purchase a good if it does not contain certain characteristics. Thus, in light of Lancaster's theory, it becomes more difficult to contend that a consumer would purchase or not purchase an item solely based on its price. In other words, while price certainly plays an important role in a consumer's food purchasing decisions, there are other competing factors that can often outweigh cost.

With specific regard to organic food, Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe (2006) use Lancaster's theory to argue that consumers can actually justify the cost of organic foods as a type of "investment" in future health:

Observed deterioration in human health over time [thus] motivates an individual to protect oneself against such depreciation losses by purchasing various types of "insurance"... The characteristics of organic food may therefore be an input into the consumer's demand function for "good health", while the price of organic food becomes the cost of the investment in "good health". (p. 8)

This "investment" type idea with regard to organic food resonates through much of the literature. Hartman and Wright (as cited in Lockie et al., 2002) separate organic consumers into two groups: consumers who feel that purchasing products that are 'earth friendly' are worth a price premium, and those who see their purchase of organic foods subject to barriers such as cost and their availability (24). Lockie et al. (2002) confirm this consumer division. While the separation is not a clear dichotomy, researchers contend that consumers feel the increased cost of organic food can be justified and viewed as a type of investment, but only if the product's benefits (i.e.

environmental impact, animal rights, personal health) are seen to outweigh the cost of the product (Lockie et al., 2002; Grunert & Juhl, 1995). In fact, Lockie et al. (2002) conclude their study with the view that the dramatic growth of the organic food market is not directly associated with an influx of wealthy patrons attracted to health and safety benefits as, they argue, is the common belief. Instead, Lockie et al. (2002) contend that concerns for both personal and family health are the driving force behind consumer purchase of organics. Lockie et al. (2002) thus contend that while organic foods are often more expensive than conventional foods, consumers of all socioeconomic status' will purchase them if a cost-benefit analysis ends in favour of the health benefits over the cost of the food.

This review of the literature has helped to contextualize my research on organic food narratives within supermarket websites. Not only have the above mentioned authors identified various themes in the discussion of organic food, but they have drawn out several important conclusions about the status and future of the organic food industry. I will draw upon these themes and predictions again in my analysis of the websites. As I will discuss later, the majority of the themes supporting the purchase of organic foods identified in the literature also appear in the discussion of organic food in the selected website content. I will thus add to this body of research by identifying which companies focus on which themes, how the values of the companies support the use of certain perspectives on organic foods, and what has been left out by the previous research.

## Chapter 2: Research and Methods

### Company Context

Each of the food stores selected is very different. Two I have categorized as “chain-mainstream” supermarkets (Safeway and Thrifty’s), one as a “chain-organic” store (Planet Organic) and one as a local business (Saanich Organics). The four selected stores have varying history, marketing tactics, business goals, consumer targets, locations, and so forth. In an attempt to ensure that my discussion of organic promotion has agency<sup>11</sup> and is grounded in the companies themselves, I will provide a brief background for each business based on publicly available information from their websites. I hope that this background information, in addition to the map of stores included (Figure 1) will help to reveal the “audience” or consumer base that each company targets.

#### *Safeway*

Safeway is one chain from a large US-based grocery conglomerate, Safeway, Inc. Safeway Inc., according to the investor relations section at Safeway.com, is one of the largest grocery store chains in North America<sup>12 13</sup>. The company owns several grocery chains; the majority of which can only be found in the United States. Their stores include Von’s, Dominick’s, Pavilions, CARRS’, among others. Most of the Safeway stores in Canada are located on the West Coast; while in the U.S., they are relatively evenly spread, though most stores can be found in and

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<sup>11</sup> I am using ‘agency’ as a way to ensure the organic food content is put into company context.

<sup>12</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>13</sup> Note: Though it is a part of a larger American company, all questions and comments about Safeway stores and products from Canada are directed through the Canadian Safeway division, with headquarters located in Calgary, AB.

around the big cities. In Canada, most Safeway locations can only be found in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Western half of Ontario (only six store locations are in this province). There is only one store location in Quebec. This narrows their Canadian consumer base to mainly Western Canada.

Information on Safeway Inc.<sup>14</sup> was not as easy to gain access to. The history of the company, unlike the other stores I examined, was difficult to locate and required navigation through a maze of financial and investment-focused web pages and documents.

The origins of the first Safeway can be traced back to the year 1915 in American Falls, Idaho where M.B. Skaggs began running his father's grocery store. In the following several decades, a chain of Skaggs stores became Safeway stores<sup>15</sup>, expanded to Canada in 1929, overcame the depression difficulties of the 1930's, and expanded quickly. Now, Safeway boasts of its commitment to value and it's over 1700 Safeway, Inc. stores within North America. Safeway has now also included a line of "Lifestyle" stores, designed for

Safeway's "Lifestyle Stores" aim to streamline the customer's shopping trip. With an in-store Starbucks, six self check-out tills, a deli with plenty of pre-made meals from roasted chickens to sushi to potato salad and even a movie-rental vending machine, my local Safeway caters to the one-stop shopper. Safeway's website describes the Lifestyle stores as "designed for busy customers who want to find everything in one place, great selection, knowledgeable staff, specialty items, and ready-to-eat meals" (Safeway, 2011, "Safeway in Canada History").

<sup>14</sup> Safeway, Inc. the *parent company* is what I'm referring to here. The information on Safeway Canada as a chain was more accessible, but information on the company who owned the Safeway chain (not to be confused for its namesake) was harder to access.

<sup>15</sup> While the name of a store is the first clue to the values of the company, it can often be difficult to ascertain the meaning of the name as defined by the company. Safeway, for example, does not reveal the reason behind the change from Skaggs to Safeway. I can only infer what values they may wish to associate with their store/company name.

busy customers who want to find everything in one place and a relaxed shopping atmosphere (Safeway, 2011, “Safeway in Canada History”).

Safeway consistently refers to itself as a company committed to value and the shopping *experience*. A large part of the company history is described in terms of growth, modernization, and company advancement: “Safeway has defined and exemplified the next generation in shopping” (Safeway, 2011, “Safeway in Canada History”).

### ***Thrifty Foods***

Thrifty Foods (or Thrifty’s) is a BC chain, but it is owned by the larger Canadian company Sobeys Inc. Sobeys Inc. owns retail stores such as IGA, FreshCo and Price Chopper in locations all across the company, but Thrifty’s itself is only in B.C. In fact, the first Thrifty Foods store was located in Victoria in 1977. As shown on the map inset in Figure 1, Thrifty’s locations are limited to the Vancouver Island (from Victoria to Campbell River) and the lower mainland (Vancouver and surrounding areas such as Tsawwassen and Abbotsford). In contrast, the Thrifty’s parent company, Sobeys Inc., is the second largest Canadian grocery retailer, with over 1,300 stores in 10 Canadian provinces. Their headquarters are located in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. Sobeys Inc. is in fact owned by the Canadian Empire Company Limited. According to their website, they are a “company whose key businesses include food retailing and related real estate” (Empire Company Ltd., 2011).

Thrifty’s is known for its involvement in sustainable endeavours and charity work. Unlike Safeway, Thrifty’s provided what seemed to be a more “personal” history of the company and a specific web page dedicated to the history and growth of the grocery chain in an easy to

find and prominently displayed part of their website. Thrifty's claims that their history dates back to the 1950's, when Alex A. Campbell began working in a grocery store in Vancouver and worked his way up to become Manager for Shop Easy, a prominent grocery retailer at the time. As mentioned above, the first Thrifty's store opened in Victoria in 1977. Since that time, Thrifty Foods has expanded to a total of 26 stores across Vancouver Island and In fact, in the discussion of its history, the webpage mentions both organic foods as a significant part of their company history:

1991: Thrifty Foods begins to carry what will become *the largest selection of certified organic products including over 70 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables of any grocery chain in British Columbia*. Today, we carry over 400 organic grocery items throughout our stores, including a wide variety of organic cheeses.  
(Thrifty Foods, 2011, "History", italics mine)

Thrifty's has thus shown its interest in environmental causes and, more specifically, organic foods.

To my surprise, the way in which Safeway and Thrifty's discuss their stores, their history, and the way in which they present organic foods are very different. Rather than being similar in that they are two chain grocery stores, Safeway and Thrifty's couldn't be more different. Thrifty's, a BC-based chain, presents itself as a company that is small and personal with a local history. They include pictures of important people in their company history and incorporate information on their company quests for sustainability and regional awards. The company history also includes very little on their parent company – beyond the name, while instead focusing on Thrifty Foods itself and local ownership, management, and growth. While still a part of a large Canadian corporation, the company seems to aim for their image to be that of a local chain.

In contrast, Safeway presents itself through the website as a part of a large company with its main goal as financial success and expansion. In almost every mention of their company history from the American website, the discussion is framed in finances. For example, the expansion of Safeway as a business from the small-time Skaggs market to the larger Safeway company is described as a result of “value” and “narrow profit margin” (Safeway, 2011, “History”). The Canadian Safeway history, from Safeway.ca, is a little bit different as it puts the growth of the store in context; including the changing supermarket as the result of automobiles, refrigeration, and so forth. But the similarity between the two historical descriptions lies in the focus on growth and the presentation of Safeway Inc. as a whole, rather than divided into its separate brands. The difference between the narratives within these two major chain websites must be noted as it has a direct effect on how the two stores present/market organic foods.

### ***Planet Organic Market***

Planet Organic Market, in contrast to the aforementioned stores, is a specifically organic grocery chain. With its origins in Alberta, Planet Organic opened its first store in 2002 in Edmonton. A smaller chain store in comparison to Thrifty’s and Safeway, Planet Organic only has a total of eight stores located in Canada. Two stores are located in BC (Victoria and Port Coquitlam), four in the company’s home province of Alberta (two in Edmonton and two in Calgary), one in Mississauga, Ontario (Port Credit) and one in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The founders, Mark Craft and Diane Shaskin, had been in the business of

As the name advertises, the store boasts almost all organic (and sometimes natural) products. Their produce section is 100% organic. In fact, painted on the wall above lettuce greens and ripe red tomatoes are the words, “100% *Organic, 100% Reassurance*”.

natural food stores since 1978. They wanted to open a larger more contemporary natural food market with a new shopping experience that was “as good as the products” (Planet Organic, 2011 “Planet Organic Story”). In the following four years, the company opened five new locations. In addition, the company took control of *Mrs. Greens Natural Market* stores in the United States, as well as *Sangsters Health Centres*, *Trophic Canada*, and *Healthy’s the Athletes Edge Inc.*; though the latter three companies were divested by Planet Organic just last year. The Planet Organic history shows a company that is much more than just a natural food store, but rather a large contributor to the health and supplement industry in Canada.

As addressed above in the discussion of how Thrifty’s and Safeway present their company history, Planet Organic’s story is also presented using language that emphasizes the tone or attitude of the company. Most of the history write up for Planet Organic highlights the financial and legal formation of Planet Organic as a whole. For example, after identifying the supplement and health store additions to the company, they state: “Planet Organic Health Corp. Benefits from significant efficiencies in the area of management, operations, information technology, purchasing, distribution, marketing and human resources” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Planet Organic Story”). This quote from their company history as posted on their website very clearly emphasizes the importance of efficient and successful business practices as a part of the company. Financial success, expansion beyond the sale of organic food, and a well-run company seem to be core values associated with the business of Planet Organic. Comparing this historical write up to those previously examined, it seems that Planet Organic’s company tone mimics that within the Safeway write up.

### *Saanich Organics*

Lastly, out of the four stores chosen for analysis, only one is completely local and not associated with a larger chain. Saanich Organics is a Vancouver Island (Saanich/Greater Victoria) company. Though it differs from the others analyzed in that it does not have a physical in-store location for consumers to visit, information from the company is still circulated through newsletters in the box delivery program as well as through the website. With only three farmers running the business Saanich Organics is a small company with the goal of providing local organic fruits and vegetables to conscientious consumers. With the participation of a number of local, certified organic farmers, Saanich Organics is able to distribute organic produce in two ways: the box delivery program and the commercial division. The residential box delivery program provides seasonal, local produce to consumers who sign-up. Customers receive a variety of vegetables and fruit (which is sometimes frozen from past crops) in their weekly boxes. In addition, the public also has access to their variety of seasonal produce at local summer markets. In their commercial division, they look to provide local grocery stores and restaurants with the same organic produce that goes out weekly in their boxes.

Run by Robin Tunicliffe, Rachel Fisher and Heather Stretch (all organic farmers themselves), Saanich Organics presents a community based and passionate approach to the farming, and distribution of the organic produce. Given the small size of the company in comparison to the others, it is no surprise that names are consistently given in the website for every task, and that personalization is the key to the community-based foundation of the company and its consequential success. This company attitude is summed up in their statement: “We strive to sustain our agricultural land, our communities, our families, and ourselves by

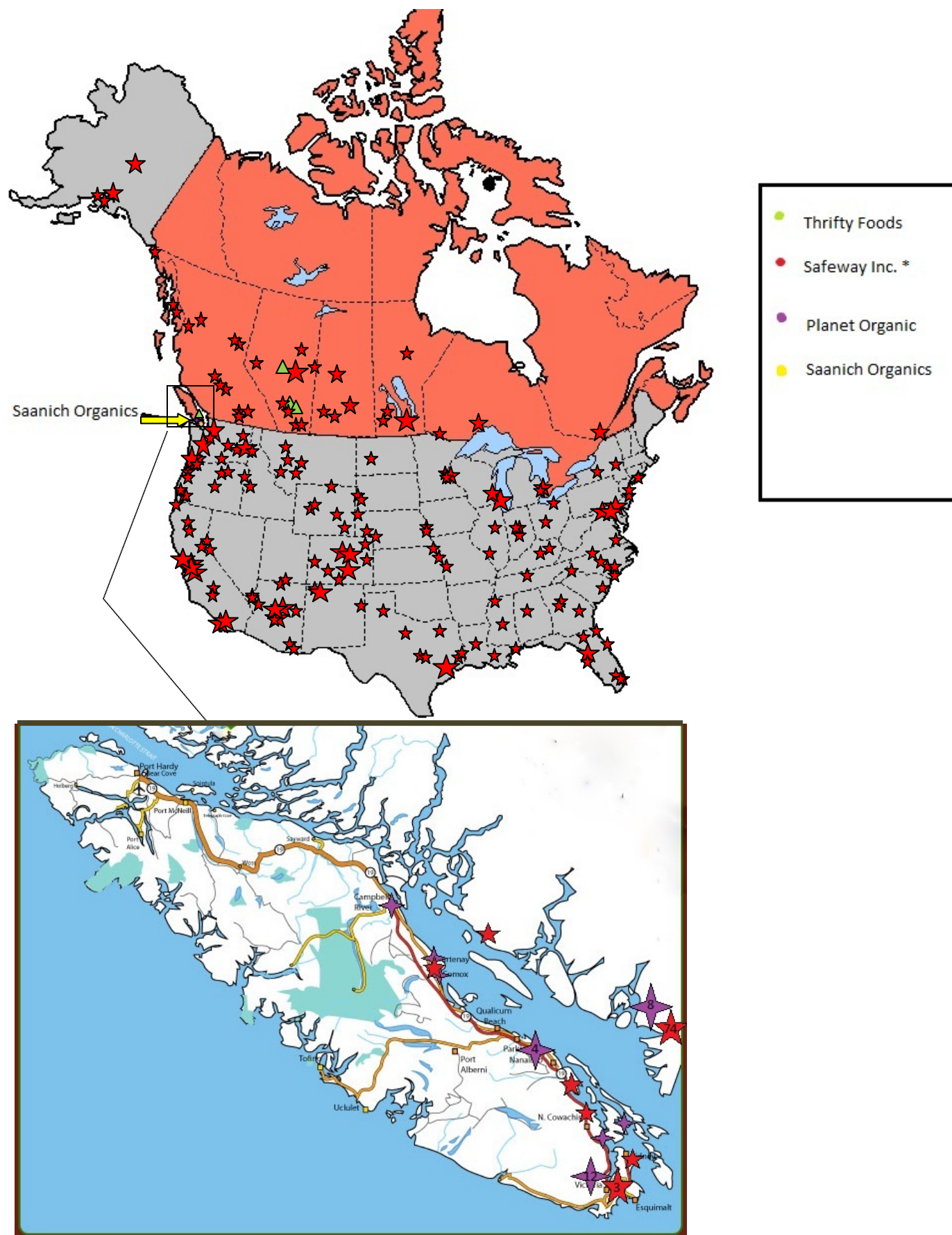
growing and marketing top quality organic fruits and vegetables for families in and around Victoria” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “About”).

Using the information gathered on company history, store locations, and financial information, it is clear that the Canadian locations of the stores examined are focused in *Western* Canada. Thus, one could assume that their target audiences for promotional material would also be within these areas. With the exception of Saanich Organics, a local company, Safeway, Thrifty’s and Planet Organic all share the same two regions as their primary location in Canada: B.C. and Alberta<sup>16</sup>. I have illustrated this by mapping the locations of the four retailers. This map does not include subdivisions or parent companies of any of the chains (such as Safeway Inc. owned Vons; or Sobeys, parent company of Thrifty’s).

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<sup>16</sup> This is taking Safeway’s American parent company into consideration, but focusing on Safeway Canada.

Figure 1



## Language and theory

In an effort to retain flexibility in my methods, I chose not to subscribe to any set way of doing “discourse analysis”. Instead, I looked to perform a critical reading of the text and imagery from sampled websites and in store promotion for organic foods; equipped with the knowledge I have gained through previous research<sup>17</sup> and a study of the literature. Acknowledging that I am not the only person interested in studying organic food-related content<sup>18</sup>, my aim was to see how the reading I have done may enhance my understanding of the existing narratives and to expand the research being done on organic foods.

Altheide (1987) argues that in fact content analysis could be viewed as a sort of ethnography. In contrast to studying people and their meaning making in a social environment, one could study the products of social interaction - such as text (Altheide, 1987). Our social interactions are documented. The notion of a “text” as a piece which can be studied is important within the context of this thesis, as I believe there is much to gain from a study of the narratives produced by a variety of food companies on the topic of organic food.

While at first my goal was to use a sort of “discourse analysis” methodology, with a familiar set of ‘guidelines’, I found along the way that the flexibility in doing a simple critical

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<sup>17</sup> I have previously done research on consumer food choice and the notions of organic and convenience foods. In a series of interviews I conducted, I asked consumers questions about how they make their food choices, where they shop, on advertisements, how they would define organic and convenience, and so forth. While I do not wish to describe the study in detail within the context of this thesis as the focus is more on consumer opinion directly and not store discourse as the focus is here, I do wish do acknowledge this previous research as a source of some of my knowledge on consumer preference and the organic food trend. See: Osborne, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> The study of organic food is a rapidly growing area, and I am likely to encounter other studies on the same topic as mine. I thus have to recognize that I want to present my research as something with insights that I hope will add to/clarify the studies of others.

reading of the text<sup>19</sup> allowed for a diversity of results. While I was not focusing on simply the number of coding instances for a given theme (which may lend itself to a Qualitative Content Analysis methodology (Altheide, 1987)), I chose to keep methodology flexible and concentrate only on what appeared as significant.

I feel that I was able to accomplish this. In fact, the very decision to remain flexible in this way allowed my results to be something different than initially intended. Had my methods been more structured, I may not have been able to shift my focus and recognize the importance of the context of the content – rather than focusing on the specifics of the content itself.

## **Methods**

Using two main sources for content (websites and in-store promotion); I started with the source that would contain the most text and imagery for analysis – the websites. After familiarizing myself with each website, and writing down all my observations about what the home page conveys (guided by the knowledge I gained in previous research and my review of the literature), what the organization was like, and how a consumer might find information on organic foods, I selected text and imagery from each website that connected with organic products and organic narratives. I compiled the selections from each website into a separate document so as to be able to upload that document for analysis into the qualitative analysis program HyperRESEARCH<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> By text, I mean content, including pictures and layout as well.

<sup>20</sup> While other qualitative software programs, such as NVivo, were suggested to me, I chose HyperRESEARCH as I felt comfortable with the software and thought the simplicity of the program suited the simplicity of this study.

HyperRESEARCH software allows the user to upload text and imagery and assign codes to selected sections or parts. This software, for my purposes, is useful in that it allows me to organize my thoughts and have easy access to any coding instance. The software also allows for annotations to be made in a specific coding selection. Thus, if I feel that a code applies to a section of text but with certain caveats, I can do so and refer back to this annotation at a later time. In addition, the software allows me to print off lists of code instances and maps and charts based on coding. This software thus provides a framework with which I can create a well constructed analysis of the selected text and imagery.

After noting where I might find information on organic foods<sup>21</sup>, as previously mentioned, I began the process of coding. The first real coding of the website material was an open coding in which anything of interest was coded for later analysis and comparison<sup>22</sup> (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). I primarily identified a total of thirty-two codes. After coding all of the selected material, I went back through a second time to look for and add in any relevant words or descriptions that may have been identified in the literature. I grouped the final list of codes into themes. I was able to narrow down this list of codes into a total of eleven themes. While this process seemed simple at first, the coding was an ongoing process. I found that the more I wrote on what I found and the longer I studied the literature and the websites, the more the themes and codes seemed to change and rearrange. I would find nuances I did not first identify until later; connections that appeared only after viewing the codes and themes through the literature. I thus note pertinent changes and modifications in my description of the codes as I believe this process is important to

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<sup>21</sup> This is also a part of my "journal" with the in-store observations, but the results are with the rest of the discussion on the discourses. I have noted how I found my website selections and where organic foods were discussed.

<sup>22</sup> See Figures 2 – 9 and 11 -13 for a breakdown of all codes and themes identified

communicate. I have also decided to include a chart showing the break-down of each of the themes into their respective codes to assist in the discussion of results.

In addition, I have included a section on my own in-store observations. While consumers obtain information in both digital and print form, promotion of organic foods also takes place directly in store and in relation to direct products. Thus, how a store is laid out, as well as images, words used to describe in store products, and interactions are a very important part of the process of deciding whether or not – and for what reason(s) - to purchase certain foods and products (Chandon et al., 2009). I kept a journal for the purposes of describing my in-store experiences at each of the locations possible<sup>23</sup>. This journal contained descriptions of store layout (what do you see walking into the store? Which direction are you led?), words used to describe organic foods, any noteworthy interactions with other customers (that is relevant to organic food/products), in addition to any other significant observations. While I will not be coding the text found during in-store observation in the same way that I coded the rest of the material (through HyperRESEARCH), I will be including it as a part of my results and will note any differences or similarities between in-store, online and print promotion for organics and include this added information in my final analysis.

While there was a significant difference between the website pages and their focus (for example, looking for mention of organic on the Safeway or Thrifty's website was a much different experience than was looking for organic on the Planet Organic or Saanich Organics website), my aim was not to compare the *amount* of organic promotional material, but rather the *content* of the material gathered. It would be unfulfilling to compare the discussion of organics if

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, as Saanich Organics is a box-program and does not have a physical location within which I could conduct such observation, this type of data was not gathered for the business.

I were to compare Safeway and Planet Organic websites simply for the amount of their discussion on organics. I would indeed find that Planet Organic had more information in general and that the information was more specific. But the comparison of the type of content and - sometimes more importantly - what is *not* included in the discussion, is often the key to uncovering the language used in the promotion of organic foods.

As I went through the codes to group them into themes, I was aware that there would be some information gained and lost within this specific part of the coding process. By this, I mean that by collecting the codes into themes, some of the specificity would be lost, but also some of the overall analytical value for the themes as a whole would be gained. In addition, there are codes that really could not be placed under one theme and are thus a part of several themes. While I don't believe that the process of grouping the codes into themes is necessary, it is certainly helpful in the analytical sense. For many of the codes, there is a lot of overlap. While there is something specific to each code, often they refer to the same piece of material or there are similar words used. Thus, in the grouping of codes into themes, the overlap can be analyzed and their relationship can provide further insight. Overall, weighing the benefits and detriments of grouping into themes, I decided that more use would come out of the themes than would a discussion of the individual codes. Of course, more on the specifics of each code and theme will be discussed in results.

## Chapter 3: Results

### Coding Results

The following is a summary chart of the codes and themes used and their frequency.

There are a few things to note in this chart. Firstly, while it seems that the frequency may be low for some (one coding instance in some cases), I took the amount of text selected for a coding instance into consideration before deciding on whether or not the code was significant enough to keep. For example, while the coding frequency for “nature” is listed at one, the code was applied to a lengthy paragraph and thus deemed significant. Secondly, stars are used to indicate when a code is included in more than one theme. In these cases, you will find that the coding frequency is included more than once (the frequency of the individual code is included in the total frequency for each theme it is a part of).

**Table 1**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Community</b>		<i>23</i>
	Importance of Trust	3
	Local	4
	Morality & Ethics	3
	Organic as Community Building	5
	Organic as Experience	4
	Personal Connection	4
<b>Individual Choice</b>		<i>15</i>
	Individualism	6
	*Personal Health*	9
<b>Cost</b>		<i>7</i>
	*Organics as Costly*	7
<b>Health</b>		<i>13</i>
	*Personal Health*	9
	*Medical/Technical	4

	Language*	
<b>Education and Information</b>		<i>12</i>
	Organic Definition	6
	Importance of Education & Info	6
<b>Authenticity and Legitimacy</b>		<i>49</i>
	Certification	14
	Distinction between Natural & Organic	2
	Scientific Proof/Lack of	4
	Legitimacy & Authenticity	10
	Organic as Indicator of High Quality	6
	*Medical/Technical Language*	4
	*Importance of Education & Information*	6
	*Morality & Ethics*	3
<b>Safety</b>		<i>9</i>
	Exercise Caution	3
	Safety	6
<b>Simplicity/Return to Nature</b>		<i>53</i>
	Environmental Concern	16
	Colour Green	2
	Fresh	2
	Nature	1
	No Chemicals	9
	Farming & Growth	8
	Return to State of Nature	5
	Purity/Wholeness	5
	Sense of "Realness"	3
	Simplicity	2
<b>Taste</b>		<i>16</i>
<b>Government Involvement</b>		<i>3</i>
<b>Consumer Behaviour</b>		<i>8</i>

## Identification of Themes

The first goal in this research project was to go through the selected content from a variety of sources and first identify the themes in the discussion and promotion of organic food. As the

themes were identified using a series of codes which were then grouped, the following addresses each of these themes as well as the codes and instances that make up these themes.

**Figure 2**



### **Community**

As indicated in Figure 2, there was a strong notion of “community” within the discussion of organic food. I chose the term community as a theme for a series of codes that often had connections to organic production and the sale of organic food as something beyond the simple production-consumption of food. Rather, this theme indicated that organic food was meant to be an experience and to involve more than the individual.

The codes included in this theme (as indicated within Figure 2) are as follows: importance of trust, local, morality and ethics, organic as community building, organic as experience and personal connection.

The most frequently assigned code within this theme was personal connection.

There was some overlap between this code and that of local, organic as experience, importance of trust, and organic as community building. An

example of this personal connection that plays into each of these overlapping themes is in the Saanich Organic website. In the explanation of how their company is run, they state “...we’re farmers first (rather than administrators)” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “Box program FAQs”). On the same note, they state “Because we like to spend as much time as we can in the field, we often aren’t in to answer the phone, but we do check our messages, so please leave one!” (Saanich

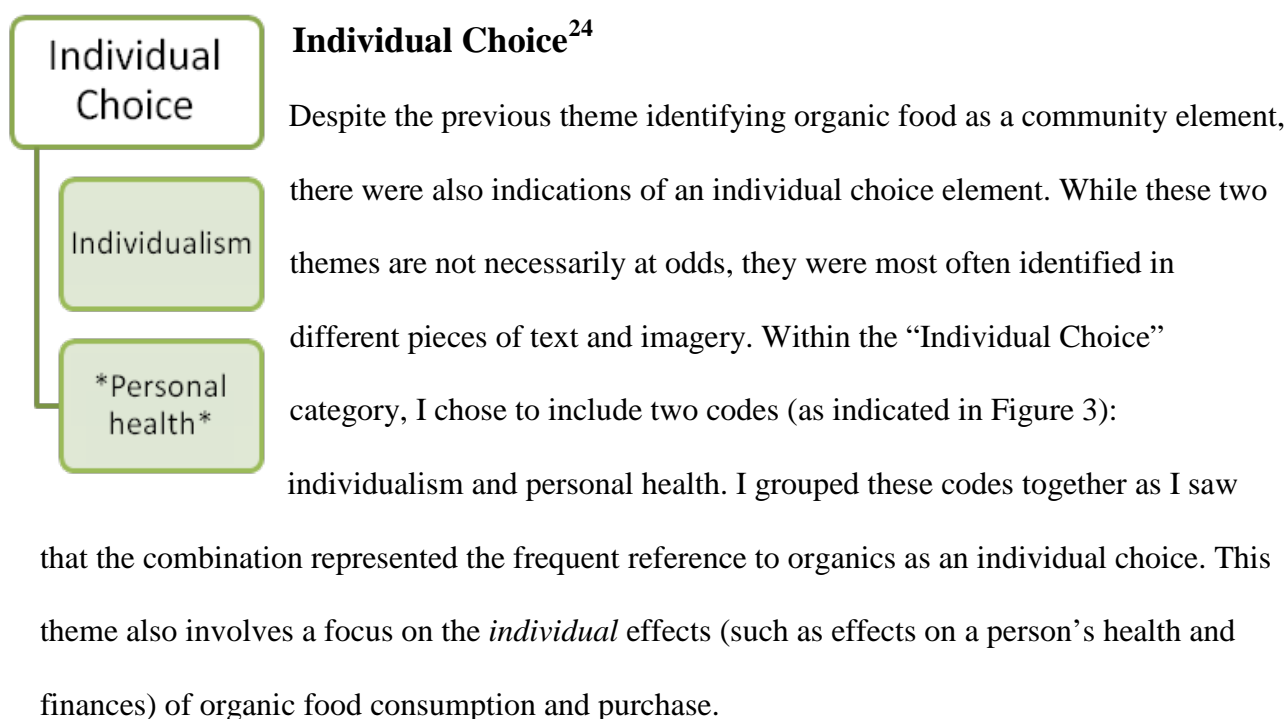
Organics, 2011, “Box program FAQ’s”). These statements not only leave the impression that the employees of Saanich Organics know their business, but also that they are directly involved in the daily work of organic farming.

The origin of organic foods came up often in their promotion. Yet, the conflation of local and organic occurred more frequently in stores with a focus on local. This occurred the most within the Saanich Organics website, which was a result of the fact that they work solely with organically-produced foods that are local. As the goal of both their residential box program and their commercial division is to distribute produce that is *both* local and organic, the mention of organic was most often accompanied by the mention of local as well. In contrast, while Thrifty’s does not specifically discuss their food sources (specifically where their organic foods originate), they often restrict their discussion of organic foods to that which applies in British Columbia. In other words, local for Thrifty’s seemed to be within B.C. In comparison to Saanich Organics, the focus on local was different (local for Saanich Organics came across as more within a community), but seemed to be equally as important to Thrifty’s and consequentially, one might infer, to their shoppers.

The sense of community is also furthered by both Planet Organic and Saanich Organics emphasizing the need for trust in the production and consumption of organics. Both emphasize the need to know and *trust* the organic producer you are purchasing from. While Organic standards have been put into place so consumers will be able to consume organic and *trust* that it is what it claims, Planet Organic and Saanich Organics both emphasize the need for that added personal connection. Planet Organic frames it in the sense that you can trust their produce as they purchase from vendors they know and trust. Specifically, they emphasize the need for trust when purchasing “natural foods” rather than organic foods. Similar to organic foods but not regulated,

they argue that it is important to know the person/supplier/vendor you are purchasing these foods from as that is the only way to trust that they are in fact natural foods. Along that same notion of trust, Saanich Organics state the full name of their friend who delivers the boxes in their residential box delivery program, noting that he is in fact “trusty”. This element of trust also overlapped with the coding of “morality and ethics”.

**Figure 3**



A focus on the individual and their choice to purchase organic food was most often found in the Safeway and Planet Organic websites, but was also made mention of in the Thrifty’s website. Safeway, at one point, very clearly states that “buying organic food is a personal

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<sup>24</sup> At one point, I had named this theme “neoliberal focus”, and it included a code to do with cost as well. Upon further review, the use of the term “neoliberal” was too much for this theme. While there were traces of neoliberalism within this grouping of ideas, the main focus was truly individual choice and health. Thus, this theme became “individual choice” and the cost code was eliminated.

choice” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Eat your fruits and veggies”). Immediately following this statement, Safeway states that in fact organic farming can have environmental benefits, yet studies have not yet concluded if organic foods actually have increased nutritional value. Thrifty’s mentions individual choice as well, and promotes their ability to provide variety and choice for the consumer to choose “what is best for them” (Thrifty Foods, 2011, “Natural Choices”). Planet Organic also comes to the conclusion that the decision to purchase organic is an individual choice, but they present it as somewhat of a challenge. Stating that “taste is an individual matter” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why go organic”), Planet Organic challenges consumers to taste organic food and make their decision based on that criteria. Both Safeway and Planet Organic also continually make reference to “you” in their discussion of organic food (“better for you”, “good for you”, and so forth).

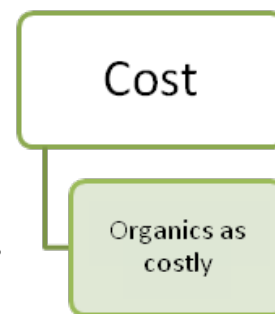
This emphasis on the individual also spills over into health. Overall, health was one of the most commented on elements of organic food. Whether it is beneficial to one’s health, potentially dangerous (as a result of something like fertilizer use), or the results are inconclusive, a discussion of health was quite often tied to organic food. Of course, reference to health was not limited to individual health and personal choice. There is a separate theme for that (see the “health” theme), but here I only wish to address that which emphasizes *personal* health in an individualistic “health investment” type of way. Within this context, health benefits were often discussed in the context of not creating better health for consumers or eliminating a symptom of a disease, but rather a way to make *your* health better. The option of purchasing organic foods was, in this context, seen as the choice to better your health. Thus, within instances where health and personal choice were conflated, health was discussed in a manner which offered choice to the consumer. Often this discussion of health was framed in terms of “wellness”. Planet Organic

does this several times, using phrases such as “personal well being” in the place of health (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why go organic”).

## Cost

The mention of cost was apparent in all of the content examined, yet not all discussed cost in the same way. The connection between organic foods and cost often arose in several ways: in both the defence of organic food (in that organic food is worth a possible inflated cost) as well as in the opinion that organic foods are *not* worth a premium price (the former most common in Planet Organic content and the latter within Safeway content)

**Figure 4**



As illustrated in Figure 3, only one code was assigned to this theme overall. In general, none of the discussion debated the notion that organic foods were costly. All seemed to agree that organic foods were associated with a premium price. While some (such as Planet Organic) argued that organic foods did not actually cost more if viewed within a certain context, what did differ (as mentioned above) was the opinion on whether or not the perceived premium was worthwhile.

In their discussion of why they think organic foods *do not* cost more in comparison to conventionally produced foods, Planet Organic seems to indicate that they do! In their FAQ section, the question is directly asked: “Why does organic food cost more?”. Their response is “Organic food doesn’t *always* cost more” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why go organic”, italics mine); thus negating the notion that organic foods are never more costly than conventionally

produced foods. They continue on to say that organic foods are priced in the same ways as conventionally produced foods; their cost reflects the cost of farming costs, transportation and so forth. In addition, they state that

...many experts believe that if indirect costs of conventional production (eg: clean-up of polluted water, replacement of eroded soils and provision of health care for ailing farmers and their workers) were factored into the price of food, organic products would be found to cost less than conventional products. (Planet Organic, 2011, "Why go organic")

Again, this statement indicates that organic foods *could* cost less than conventional foods, but this is likely only if the cost for environmental damage and modes of production were included in the cost for conventionally produced foods. The question of the immediate cost to the consumer for organic foods is thus not fully addressed.

Safeway acknowledges the price of organic foods, while stating that their *O Organics* product line is affordable (in contrast to other organic foods). In defence of organic foods, the Safeway website also indicates that organic foods cost quite a bit less than they used to: "[a]lthough [organic foods] are considerably less expensive than they were in the past, they still cost more" (Safeway, 2011, "Eat your fruits and veggies").

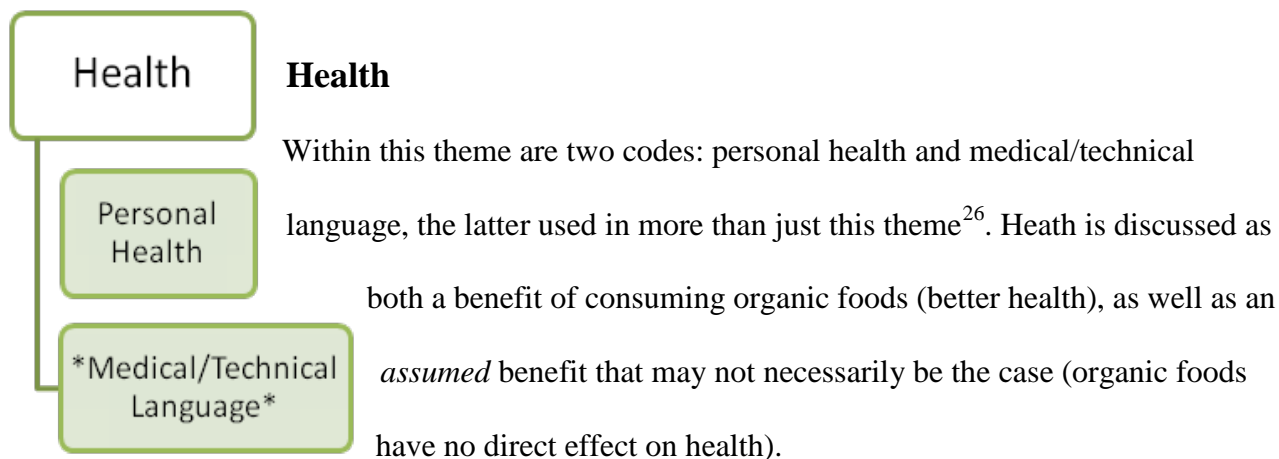
Thrifty's directly addresses the cost of organic foods. In their website section dedicated to discussing organic foods, they answer the question "Why does organic cost more?" Their response includes the justification that organic foods require more labour and that farmers must go through an intense certification process. In addition, Thrifty's argues, "organic farmers operate on a smaller scale and don't benefit from the federal subsidies<sup>25</sup> received by conventional producers" (Thrifty's, 2011, "Why does organic cost more?").

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<sup>25</sup> There are several mentions of federal subsidies received by conventional farmers that are not received by organic farmers in both the Thrifty's and Planet Organic websites. While there are no specifics given in either

Lastly, Saanich Organics makes a few statements about cost in relation to organic produce purchased in a grocery store and organic produce delivered in their boxes. In answer to the question they pose about their boxes, “how do prices compare to the grocery store?”, the Saanich Organics team acknowledges all the thought that goes in to their pricing. In contrast to grocery stores, whose prices fluctuate, their prices remain the same for a year; taking into consideration labour costs and other basic factors. As a result, they state that depending on how difficult it is to grow certain things, the price will likely reflect that level of difficulty. Some fruits or vegetables will thus be more expensive, while others will be cheaper. The quality, however, makes it worth it: “[w]e guarantee you the highest quality produce with flavour that will "wow" you with its simple authenticity” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “Box program FAQ’s”).

**Figure 5**




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mention, I can only assume that they are discussing subsidies provided by the Canadian government to prevent farm failure.

<sup>26</sup> The stars in the theme illustrations indicate that the particular code is a part of more than one theme.

Safeway discusses organic food within the context of health as a result of their website containing a pharmacy-based section for health issues. For example, in a specific article on managing diabetes and nutrition, the topic of the possible benefits of organic food is broached<sup>27</sup>. Safeway does not seem to make a claim either way in regard to organic foods being healthier or not healthier. They acknowledge the lessening of chemicals in organic produce, but note also that organics can harbour bacteria that can be a cause for concern. They conclude in this section that “studies are not conclusive in terms of nutrient content” (Safeway, 2011, “Eat Your Fruits and Veggies”). In a separate article also within their pharmaceutical health section, Safeway makes a stronger claim in regard to evidence of the health benefits of organic foods, stating that there has been no evidence in research to support a higher nutrient content in organic foods. Consequently, organics *could* be healthier for your body, but they don’t seem to be able to support either side. They do caution consumers to “keep the organic issue in perspective” as many of the studies mentioned in the article were conducted with conventionally produced fruits and vegetables and not organic<sup>28</sup>.

Planet Organic is very obvious about their commitment to the health of their customers. The first of three reasons why the company was founded includes their hope to “...contribute to the personal well being of our customers” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Our Promise”). This is apparent in their section answering questions on organic food. They caution that chemicals in pesticides, antibiotics, additives and other non-organic elements in conventionally produced food have been linked to cancer and other diseases. In contrast, they find that organic products are

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<sup>27</sup> The subsection is entitled “An opinion on organic”; thus eliminating any possibly negative responses to the section as Safeway can claim it to be not fact, but an opinion on the role of organic.

<sup>28</sup> Also belongs to Safety discourse.

healthier overall and decrease the risk of being exposed to chemicals with long-lasting effects on your health. In Planet Organic's discussion of the health benefits of organic foods, they also include concerns over genetically modified products. A discussion of GMO's requires quite a bit of explanation in order to inform consumers how a product of this type might affect their health. While it doesn't necessarily relate to organic foods, the explanation is important as they clarify that their foods do not contain genetically modified ingredients.

Planet Organics also takes the commitment to health a step further with their "Natural Living" department. They state that this department "is where you'll find organic and natural health care and living products. Natural Living products include vitamins, minerals, herbal supplements and all types of personal and body care products that are made without harmful preservatives" (Planet Organic, 2011, "Natural Living")<sup>29</sup>. Much like Safeway's pharmacy, the intent of this department is to assist consumers in maintaining health. Unlike Safeway's pharmacy, no prescriptions are required. Instead, a consumer must do their own research or rely on the staff's knowledge to assist them in purchasing supplements, homeopathic remedies, or personal care products.

Thrifty's also makes mention of the health benefits of organics. While they are certainly less specific than Planet Organic, they still identify organic foods as "supporting a healthy lifestyle" (Thrifty Foods, 2011, "Focus on Organic"). They also make mention, as is discussed within the individual choice theme, that providing the option of organic foods for their customers allows the customer to choose what is best (and thus most healthy) for them.

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<sup>29</sup> This is something that I have explored in previous research. The connection between the 'green movement', organic food, and the supplement industry is very strong. Marion Nestle's book *Food Politics* discusses this connection at length. While I do not have enough space to get into it here, it is enough to note that the connection exists.

Saanich Organics, in contrast, makes no mention of the personal health benefits of organic foods. Instead, their focus remains on taste, authenticity, and environmental sustainability as the benefits of organic food.

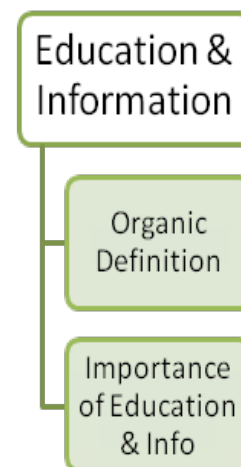
## Education and Information

More prevalent in some selections than others, there was certainly a common theme regarding the need for education and information on organics.

Defining what organic means within the context of food was a big part of this. Unfortunately for consumers, the definition of what is organic can be quite complex. Involved in this definition, of course, is the government-legitimized certified organic definition, which includes information on accepted agricultural practices and fertilizers used, percentages of organics in pre-packaged products and so forth. Organic foods are also often defined within this context by what they lack: chemicals. This is the first thing mentioned in almost every definition. For example, Thrifty's states, "[o]rganic foods are grown without using synthetic chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or fertilizers" (Thrifty Foods, 2011, "Focus on Organic"). While some of the definitions, such as Planet Organic's definition, contextualize this lack of chemicals by calling them toxic or unhealthy, or by focusing on the environmental damage these conventional methods can cause, it is still the primary factor in what distinguishes organic foods from conventional foods.

However, the definition of what organic *is* extends beyond the standards for certification. It seems that the definition of organic requires an explanation of what organic *means*. While the definitions do not necessarily need to include anything more than that which was mentioned

**Figure 6**



above, most do. Included is information on environmental sustainability, taste, and lifestyle. Organic foods are also often associated with other social, ethical, or environmental certifications that add to the organic product, even though they are not necessarily associated. For example, in the promotion of their *O Organics* product line, Safeway adds “O Organics introduced Fair Trade Certified™ coffee to its line of offerings, which supports a better life for farming families through fair prices, direct trade, community development and environmental stewardship” (Safeway, 2011, “O Organics”). Though there is nothing intrinsically organic about Fair Trade, the organic movement’s efforts towards ethical and environmentally friendly eating is illustrated in the connections between these different product types. Safeway is only one of many companies who look to combine them.

Also, just as consumers would be curious in the benefit of any higher priced or exotic food, organics were often treated as a new and unfamiliar food which required education so as to “properly” purchase and enjoy. This is illustrated in several of the grocery store websites (not only just the stores with specific focus on organic) having a section dedicated to organic foods. These sections not only promoted organic foods and the costs or benefits of the purchase or consumption of these foods, but there was also a focus on providing information for the consumer so as to create an environment where the consumer could make an “educated choice”.

## Authenticity and Legitimacy

The theme of authenticity and legitimacy was very prevalent throughout the promotion of organic food, not only in the more obvious ties to organic certification, but also sometime as a

**Figure 7** measure of the quality of organic food and the health benefits (or lack of)



of organics.

Certification was the first, and most obvious, code to add to this theme. The discussion of certification was often brought up as a way to “legitimize” what was organic. Defining that which was certified required a bit of explanation, often with references to external certification or government certified-organic websites and reports. Thrifty’s included the most references for certification and information on organic foods. The difference between “certified organic” and “organic” foods was most often with regard to canned and dry-goods. These food products required an explanation of certification as Canadian national standards require only 70% of the ingredients contained to be organic in order to receive the Canada certified-organic label.

Safeway included very little on the subject of certification, besides the fact that all of the products in their *O Organics* line were USDA certified organic. Planet Organic and Thrifty’s, on the other hand, were both very explicit in their discussions of certified organic foods.

Saanich Organics’ mention of organic certification was mainly limited to their identification of the farms and farmers they work with as all being certified organic. In each mention of organic, they preface it with

“certified”. For example, in the explanation of how their commercial division works, they state, “[w]e wanted to give chefs and produce managers a way to access the produce of several local, small, *certified (or transitional) organic farms* with one weekly phone call, and one consistent weekly delivery” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “Commercial”). This is one of many examples in which the certification is an important part of their discussion of organic food and farms.

Some website selections also noted the difference between natural foods and those that are organic. Often this was tied into discussions of certification. The word organic was used as a way to identify foods or products that were defined in a certain way with companies who were certifiable, even if the product itself was not yet certified. On the other hand, natural products had a variety of meanings and were less tied to the farming or production practices and more to the contents of the item. Within this context, in order to get to the information on organic foods within the Thrifty’s website, you must first click on a link entitled “Natural Choices”. Thus, there was a little bit of overlap when it came to these terms. Sometimes natural was used as a way to distinguish something that was not necessarily conventionally produced, but was not fully organic; and sometimes the term was simply used to *describe* the nature of organic foods (as in natural thus chemical, hormone, additive free).

This theme included a lot of what I called “scientific proof” (or lack of) and “medical/technical language”. In regard to the authenticity of organic food claims, some specific language was required on the part of the company describing the products, in order to show that they had the knowledge. In some parts, this would indicate a reference to previous research. Safeway mentions several times, in the articles coming from their pharmaceutical section, that the “research states” or “studies have shown”. Yet, no specific references are usually given for these claims. In other content selections, such as that which can be found on the Thrifty’s

website, technical language includes a discussion of farming practices. One example of this use of “technical language occurs on the Thrifty’s website within their explanation of organic farming methods: “[w]eeds are controlled through *crop rotation, mechanical tillage* and *hand weeding*, as well as through *cover crops, mulches* and other management methods” (Thrifty Foods, 2011, “Focus on Organic”). For the average consumer, it is likely that these farming terms would be unfamiliar.

There are also a substantial amount of connections made between organic foods and implicit and explicit claims of quality. Planet Organic makes the most references to this “high quality” with specific relation to organic foods in general, as opposed to a specific product line. One example of this is in Planet Organics’ statement: “many gourmet chefs across Canada are choosing to use organic foods in the recipes, due to the superior flavour and quality of these products” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why go organic”). In this case, the quality of the food is illustrated in the fact that chefs want to cook with it. The quality of organic foods is also often associated with taste (referred to as “flavour” in this quote). Greater taste is seen to be another indicator of this high quality.

In the code identified as “legitimacy and authenticity”, I included that which didn’t fit into the aforementioned codes, but was still notable as an effort to show authenticity or to legitimate an organic food. While not specific to certification, many of the coding instances involved external legitimating agencies. Some websites referred to Health Canada or the EPA to provide authority on issues of environmental sustainability or health benefits. Thrifty’s “Focus on Organic” website section included mention of every agency from Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia to the B.C. Association of Regenerating Agriculture. In addition, they emphasize that certified organic foods must be certified by an agency with

authority. In the promotion of some of their certified organic products, they include the line “certified by QAI” (Thrifty Foods, 2011, “Compliments Organics”).

Lastly, though not confined to this specific theme, I included the codes “morality and ethics”, and “importance of education and information” within the theme of legitimacy and authenticity as they often overlapped with the other codes. Morality and ethics mostly pertained to the discussion of environmental sustainability; while education and information was present throughout almost every code in this theme.

## Safety

The theme of safety was used both as a way to encourage and express concerns for the

consumption of organics. In support of organic foods, Planet Organic,

**Figure 8**



Thrifty’s and Saanich Organics discussed the benefit of organic foods as a safe choice. In other words, consumers of organic foods could relax as their bodies would be “safe” from chemicals and other negative aspects of non-organic food. In contrast, Safeway emphasized the need for caution when making food choices. They argued that organic foods did not necessarily equal a safe and reliable choice.

The narrative supporting organic foods as safe was most commonly used at Planet Organic, where the notion that organic foods are safer than conventionally grown/produced foods is, quite literally, painted on a wall: “100% organic, 100% reassurance”<sup>30</sup>. While they still encourage their customers to wash their produce, they argue that it may become contaminated

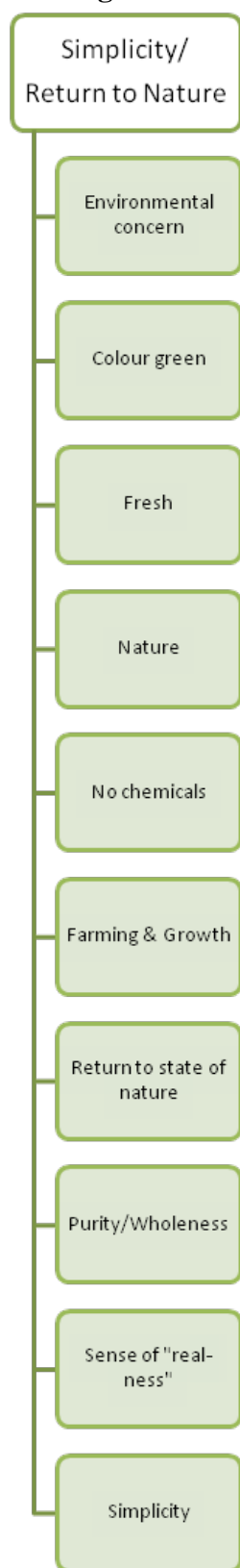
<sup>30</sup> This is discussed again in the In-Store observations.

because of chemicals involved in conventional production may have leached into the groundwater or may travel through wind. In addition, Planet Organic makes a particularly bold statement in deeming their store a “No risk zone”: “[w]e want our customers to be adventurous shoppers and try new things. We stand behind all of our products” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Natural Living”). Thus, the store itself becomes a “safe zone” in which customers can trust that they are protected from the dangers associated with conventionally produced foods.

Safeway, in contrast to Planet Organic, most often discusses the need to exercise caution with regard to fruit and vegetable consumption: “[w]hether you use conventional produce or organic, food safety is key” (Safeway, 2011, “The Power of Fruits and Vegetables”). In fact, Safeway urges customers to be cautious while consuming *any* fruit or vegetable, coming to a different conclusion than Planet Organic, who argue that organic produce is safer to consume than conventional and thus insinuating that less cautionary measures are required before consumption.

### **Simplicity and Return to Nature**

The codes within this theme were some of the most frequently used in this analysis, and overall this theme was one of the most prominent within the selected text and imagery. The notion that organic food is a part of a return to nature or a return to a simpler time in which mass food production and chemical fertilizers were not used was quite common and mentioned in some form on all websites. Descriptions that conjured up notions of quaint roadside stands and small countryside farms were scattered throughout the descriptions of organic food origin and production: “Organic agriculture is a holistic system of production that takes farming back to

**Figure 9**

basics” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic?”). Rather than referencing companies or large conventional farming techniques, the mention of organic farming/agriculture was often associated with simple ideas of how food was once produced – and should be again: “... foods grown naturally in well-balanced soils, ripened by the sun” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”). Discussion coded within this theme invoked very nostalgic feelings. Within quite a bit of the content in this theme, especially within the material coded “purity/wholeness” and “simplicity,” is the notion of harmony and balance: “[o]rganic practices generally include growing food in harmony with nature, without the use of pesticides to create a community within soil organisms” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”). This notion of harmony and balance was not only used within the context of organic farming techniques, but also within the creation and support of an “organic versus conventional” dichotomy. In this dichotomy, conventional food production is linked with destructive environmental practices and mass production; while organic food production is linked with environmental sustainability and small-scale farming operations.

The notion of the “return to nature” or to a time of simplicity was very much illustrated by the “sense of realness”. This “sense of realness”<sup>31</sup> occurs in reference to understanding the contents of the food one consumes.

<sup>31</sup> The “sense of ‘realness’” code could have arguably been included in the “legitimacy and authenticity” discourse, but I chose to keep it as a part of this theme as I felt it fit better.

The notion of “real food” seems to indicate that the food consumed is authentic and contains ingredients that are natural and easily identifiable. In fact, this is one of the key selling points for Safeway’s O Organics line: [t]reat yourself to the unique experience of real food” (Safeway, 2011, “O Organics”). “Realness” is also used in the discussion of certification. Certification becomes the way in which organic foods are real. A customer can know that they are in fact consuming ‘real’ organic food if certification can verify that claim.

Purity and wholeness is another large part of this narrative. While it is Planet Organic and Saanich Organics that contain the majority of the coded material, both Thrifty’s and Safeway also contain terms that support this code. The Safeway website mentions the terms “clean” and “pure” several times in relation to organic foods. In addition, Thrifty’s references environmental damage as a way to gage the *impurities* of conventional food production; and, by comparison, the purity of organic foods and organic farming. Tied to this is also the codes “fresh” and “color green”. When they are used within the context of wholeness and environmental sustainability they become indicators of “good” organic food.

Lastly, concern for the environment plays a major role in this theme. Planet Organic illustrates this in their statement: “[o]rganic farmers strive to incorporate practices that are mindful of their effect on the Earth to create a minimal adverse effect on the environment” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”). The company focuses their conversation about environmental sustainability efforts on farming practices. Saanich Organics also makes reference throughout their website to the environmental benefits of organics in general as well as organic foods from small, local farms: “[t]he farmers of Saanich

**Figure 10**



Organics are committed to encouraging the sustainability of small-scale farms” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “Commercial”). The consumption and production of organic food thus becomes a way to support environmental sustainability.

A visual example of this “return to nature” theme can be seen in the Thrifty’s Organics logo (See Figure 10 to right). Portraying farmland with greenery and insects, the image contains no people, buildings or machinery that may be associated with farming. For me, rolling rural hills and blue sky conjure up notions of simple countryside farms and small-time food production.

## Taste

While there were many different contexts for the mention of taste (whether or not organic food was tastier; whether taste was a contributing factor to the increased price of organic food, etc.), taste was a continual theme throughout all of the selected content.

**Figure 11**



Safeway discusses taste both in general with regard to organics as well as with specific reference to their O Organics line. The difference between the two is in who makes the taste claim. Safeway confidently boasts: “[t]aste the way food should be with O Organics” (Safeway, 2011, “O Organics”). In contrast, in their article on fruits and vegetables, which includes a section on organic foods, they state, “[m]any consumers say organic foods have better flavour” (Safeway, 2011, “Eat Your Fruits and Veggies”). Safeway thus makes taste claims mostly in regard to their *own* product line, but not to organic foods as a whole.

Thrifty's, on the other hand, does make the claim that organic foods taste better: “[e]ating organic foods promotes a sustainable economy, creates balanced ecological communities, supports a healthy lifestyle and tastes great too!” (Thrifty Foods, 2011, “Focus on Organic”).

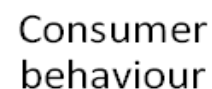
Saanich Organics' taste claims stem from not only the fact that the food is organic and local, but also that it is fresh: “[w]e pick on Mondays and deliver on Tuesdays, so the taste and nutrition are out of this world” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “Box”).

By comparison, it is Planet Organic that discusses taste the most. While they claim that taste can really only be determined on an individual matter, they continually use it as an added benefit in the consumption of organic food. Planet Organic argues that due to the superior taste and flavour of organic foods, both chefs and consumers alike are looking to purchase organics instead of conventional foods. Much like Thrifty's, they make an all encompassing statement that includes taste: “[w]e believe that organic produce is better for the Earth, better for you, and just tastes better” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”).

## Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour was a code on its own that didn't really seem to fit with any of the other themes. The code I used as a way to flag any statements on the topic of consumer behaviour by the companies. By this

**Figure 12**



Consumer  
behaviour

I mean that the coded statements indicate that the content is either discussing or predicting how consumers behave (in connection with organic food). The statements made by these companies reveal what *they* think consumers might want and thus how they wish to market organic foods to conform to those desires.

One such marketing strategy is revealed by Safeway, and of course supported by the content that I've already discussed. In a response written in answer to the question "Is Organic Better?", Safeway states, "...people buy organic for reasons other than nutrient value" (Safeway, 2011, "The Power of Fruits and Vegetables"). They use this statement as a stepping stone for further discussion on organic foods and the possibility of their environmental sustainability in comparison to other foods. While they draw no conclusion here, and encourage the consumer to 'think for themselves', the statement acknowledges much of what Safeway reveals through language: consumers want more from organic foods than just better nutrient value.

Planet Organic sees consumers as thirsty for knowledge. The first thing they say in the introduction to their "Why Go Organic" FAQ-type section is "[w]e regularly receive questions from our customers about the differences between organic produce and other alternatives. To help you feed your mind, we've compiled this list of frequently asked questions about organic produce and practices" (Planet Organic, 2011, "Why Go Organic"). This, again, is supported by much of the Planet Organic discussion in that education and information is needed for consumers to purchase organic foods.

While Thrifty's and Saanich Organics do make mentions of consumer behaviour, it is less direct and not as obvious as the claims made by Planet Organic and Safeway.

## **Government Involvement**

Lastly, the code of government involvement was used to mark mention of provincial and federal interaction with the farming and legislation of organic foods. Initially, this code was a part of the community theme. The

**Figure 13**



Government  
Involvement

reason for this initial inclusion was due to its overlap with the community codes. Each time this code was used, it was in relation to the size and scale of farms. Often it was to do with funding. In selections I coded as “government involvement”, both Planet Organic and Thrifty’s discuss how organic farms are often smaller and don’t receive the same benefits from the federal government that conventional farms do. Planet Organic clearly states, “organic farmers operate on a smaller scale, and don’t benefit from the federal subsidies received by conventional producers” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”). As a result of this lack of funding, the narrative seems to imply a sense of community which results from a lack of federal funding (as well as the smaller size of organic food producers). This is also mentioned by Saanich Organics, who very simply state: “Saanich Organics is a community of farmers from small, certified organic farms who work together” (Saanich Organics, 2011, “About”); again, underscoring the importance of size in community building.

Initially I had grouped the “government involvement” code in with the community theme as a result of its interaction with the other codes in that grouping. However, upon further review of the coding themes, it was easier for analytical purposes to keep government involvement separate from the community theme. I thus chose to separate “government involvement” from the rest, and made it its own separate theme.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

The above description of coded material is full of information on organic narratives. While there is a great deal of overlap among the eleven identified themes, there are certainly very clear arguments throughout the selected text, imagery and experiences. In fact, the ways in which these overlap and the common words (and codes) that create them reveal a lot about the origins and *meanings* of the content. In this analysis, I further examine discussion of organics as it has appeared in the literature and in the selected website and in-store content. I want to know if the literature has accurately identified the ways in which organic food is promoted. In addition, I look to see how each of the food stores uses the themes that I have identified. Which company uses which theme? How and why are they focusing on different/similar areas of organic food?

### A Second Look at the Language of Organics

Rather than simply reducing the results to numbers, in which the themes including the most coding instances would be deemed the most significant, I looked beyond these numbers to include the nuances in the coding. In addition to the fact that I think there is more to be discovered by looking beyond the numbers, I also extend my analysis as a way to be *reflexive* in my research. By acknowledging my bias in assigning codes and grouping the codes into themes, I hope to eliminate some of the consequences of this bias by being flexible in my analysis of the results, and recognize that “how [I] write is a reflection of [my] own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that [I] bring to [this] research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 179).

One of the important nuances I included was in reference to the *interaction* between themes. I looked to account for overlap with other themes (Do they overlap with many others? Are they pertinent in many different pieces of text?), their appearance in different text selections from each company, and lastly, the way in which the codes assigned to a theme work together (do they often overlap? can the codes in this theme also apply to others?). Taking into account the aforementioned factors, the most common themes are as follows: authenticity and legitimacy, simplicity/return to nature, and community. I will address the nuances within these and other themes.

As I compared the themes in the website content to those found in the literature, I identified a few overarching trends in the discussion of organic foods: a discussion of the organic “experience”, the notion of going “back to basics”, a focus on the local production of food, and the concept of internal versus external focus when it comes to consumer food purchase. It is these narratives that I will discuss in my analysis with reference to both the website content as well as the literature on organic food. In addition, I will discuss what is missing, as well as what I feel to be the most important element coming out of this study: the company context.

### **What’s Missing?**

Most of the themes identified within the results of the analysis were mentioned by authors in the literature review. The bucolic imagery associated with organic foods, the assumed price premium, notions of taste, the health benefits, and other such narratives, were no surprise. Yet, much of what can be revealed through content analysis lies not only in what is said (or written/shown), but also in what is lacking. In the following few pages, I will note what showed

in the literature and appeared in previous research as language associated with organic that I was not able to specifically identify in my analysis of the supermarket organic website content.

One such narrative that I did not find to be present within the selected content was that of concern for animal welfare. In fact, the majority of the discussion of organic foods was limited to produce. While many times within the literature on organic food was the mention of consumer concern for the treatment of animals (Aarset et al., 2004; Cook, Reed & Twiner, 2009; Hughner et al., 2007), almost none of the content supported this claim as very little extended beyond fruits and vegetables and pre-packaged meals. Safeway's O Organics line would carry meat products, but nothing is said with regard to animal welfare and organic meats. Saanich Organics, of course, only markets fruits and vegetables. Both Planet Organic and Thrifty's briefly mention items such as cheeses and meats as a part of their organic food selection, but neither ties animal welfare into discussions of organic food. While Planet Organic does discuss the benefits of Free-Range eggs and the welfare of the chickens within this context, neither store ties this concern for animal welfare into a priority for eating organic. It seems to be something put to the side (an added benefit, but not the sole reason to eat organically). Thus, while some would argue that a reason to eat organic may be animal welfare, my analysis of the supermarket website content did not back this assumption.

While it is not invisible in all of the content, the inclusion of morality and of a 'betterment' that accompanies organic food consumption and associated lifestyle choices was more pertinent for some companies examined than others. Thrifty's, Planet Organic, and Saanich Organic all included elements (again, some more than others) of a sense of accomplishment and bettered lifestyle that was associated with the consumption of organic foods. Whether this was tied to personal health, environmental sustainability, or other reasons to consume organic, there

were continual reminders of the benefits to a purchase of this type. Yet Safeway, while promoting their O Organics line, often focused their discussion of organics on the need for caution and information. While they promote their organic food line with promises of better taste and affordability, environmental benefits and personal health is left out of this specific promotion. The remaining discussion is that of providing information from both ‘sides’ (for and against organic foods) so as to provide a space for consumers to choose. The dialogue comes out sounding sceptical of organics, despite their participation in the sale of organic foods.

The lack of frank discussion on the topic of politics and food was also surprising to me. Despite the fact that the selected material was promotional in nature and not meant solely for educational or expositional purposes, I would have expected some of the more local material (such as the Saanich Organics content), and the educational FAQ-type website sections (especially on the Planet Organic website) to address – however briefly – some of the political reasons for choosing (or not choosing) organics. One such reason being the assumed ‘alternative’ option from conventional food production, as addressed above.

As previously discussed, organic foods are often conflated with local foods. While Fonte (2008) separates these food movements, the selected content does not support the separation of local and organic. Keeping in mind that Saanich Organics sells only local certified organic foods and thus could not support this separation, the remaining stores still seem to conflate small local farms with organic production. With the exception of Safeway, who discusses their product line of organic foods (O Organics) without necessarily identifying their origin, Thrifty’s and Planet Organic both conflate local and organic, whether indirectly through their descriptions of organic food or directly through naming organic producers and discussing local and organic food options. Fonte (2008) goes so far as to argue that consumers are choosing local foods (instead of

organic foods) as a way to protest mainstream food production. Given her description of the conventionalisation of organic foods, mainstream foods seem to include organics. Again, this debate comes up in multiple forms. The question of whether organic foods can still be considered alternative (or a niche market as a whole) or whether organic foods have become a part of the array of conventional food options remains to be seen. I would posit that it may be both. While organic farming methods and ingredients still differ from foods which are conventionally produced, what seems to be in question is whether or not organic foods must be produced on a small scale to be organic. The technical answer is no, but the consumer opinion may differ.

### **Organic Eating or Organic Experience?**

Several of the themes identified in the website content had to do with the description of organics as *more than* the scientific or government-legitimized definition of certified organic. For example, “simplicity/return to nature” and “community” contain codes such as “nature”, “purity/wholeness” and “organic as experience”. This identification of organic foods as extending beyond food produced using alternative farming methods was a common theme through almost *all* of the content. At the beginning of my research on this topic, I found this very theme in Barndt’s (2008) work following the tomato across national borders. She calls food an intimate commodity, and ties it to “ecological, political and cultural processes” (2). As previously discussed, participants involved in my previous study sometimes based their decision of whether or not to purchase organic foods on moral, financial, or social factors<sup>32</sup>. Authors have argued that consumers purchase organic foods for reasons from animal welfare to altruism

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<sup>32</sup> See footnote 17 on page 33; Osborne, 2008.

(Hughner et al., 2007; Eden, 2011). The selected grocery store text<sup>33</sup> illustrates exactly this. In fact, the Planet Organic website goes so far as to state, “[a]s you’ll see, organic is more than an environmentally-sound way to grow and produce food. It’s a state of mind.” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic”).

This extension of the organic food narrative to something beyond the food itself has been a part of organics since their beginning. As Paull (2006) outlined in his description of Lord Northbourne’s definition of organic farming, Northbourne felt that organic stretched beyond the food produced by the farm. In fact, it was the way the farm was run that first concerned him: the notion of holistic farming practices, rather than organic foods. Cook et al. (2004) also underscores the importance placed on experience. The unfamiliar products and foods lend themselves to marketing based on experience as a way to draw the consumer in to choose a new product (Cook et al., 2004; Cook & Crang, 1996). With some arguing that organic foods are a part of a ‘niche’ or alternative food market (Bartels & Reinders, 2010; Warner, 2005), they often fit into Cook et al.’s (2004) category of the “unfamiliar” or “exotic”. Often, as authors such as Cook and Crang (1996) argue, the experiential element of food marketing involves the element of travel. Cook and Crang (1996) use the concept of “geographical knowledges” to understand the importance of geography in the commodification of food. The authors state that their understanding of “material culture” follows the work of Daniel Miller<sup>34</sup> in which “cultural artefacts have to be understood in relationship to their social and spatial contexts” (p. 132).

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<sup>33</sup> I am using text in this case as that which conveys meaning. In other words, it is not limited to simple language but rather the full array of meaningful discourse from imagery to medium to word use.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, D. (1987). *Material culture and mass consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hence, they have focused their collaborative work on the geographical/spatial element of food commodities and consumption.

Cook and Crang (1996) posit that a food can be packaged with knowledge (geographical knowledge) of where it originates, who produces it and how/where it should be used, consumed, and so forth. They state, “[t]hese geographical knowledges – based in the cultural meanings of places and spaces – are then deployed in order to ‘re-enchant’ (food) commodities and to differentiate them from the devalued functionality and homogeneity of standardized products, tastes and places” (Cook & Crang, 1996, 132). In this way, geographical knowledges can be used to distinguish one food from another. So called “exotic” foods can be recognized as such as they are accompanied by this additional knowledge. Cook and Crang’s (1996) insight fits so well with my analysis of organic food promotion. The consumer who purchases what is considered (by them or the market they purchase it from) to be an “exotic” food is able to introduce an element of “material culture” that is new and culturally and geographically distant to their culinary world (Cook & Crang, 1996, p. 136). While the primary goal of marketing organic foods as a part of a lifestyle or experience may not require the description of far-off lands as some exotic fruits may encourage, this type of marketing may still be used as a way to connect the consumer with the product’s origins. Perhaps instead of being transported to “tropical paradises. With their standard issue palm trees. Under which the fruits...lie. In a basket. Or spread out on some palm leaves” (Cook et al., 2004, p. 659), consumers of organic foods may be transported to a small, local, organic farm where “crunchy carrots and succulent snap peas are among the delicious surprises” (Saanich Organics, “Box Program”, 2011). An analysis of the organic narratives shows this very same emphasis on experience and organic food. While some stores promote this experiential

version of organics more than others, in one way or another, each company supports and invests in experiential notions of organic foods.

### **Going Back to Basics**

After separating the themes of authenticity/legitimacy and simplicity/return to nature, I found that while the narratives could be separated, they were also very similar and shared a lot of similar discourse. In fact, there was a great deal of significant overlap. One of the most obvious connections between the two themes I created is the notion of a sense of “realness”. There was a continual reference to authenticity as a part of why one would look to make things simpler or organic. As if a return to a simpler method of food production and the removal of harmful chemicals from foods would bring “us” back to the way it should be. The way food *should* be grown; the way food *should* taste. Safeway discusses this very notion, as previously discussed, in the marketing of their O Organics product line: “[t]reat yourself to the unique experience of *real* food” (Safeway, 2011, “O Organics”, italics mine). Thus, another example of organics as *more than food* lies within the descriptive imagery of the “simplicity/return to nature” narrative. This “back-to-basics” type narrative encourages consumers to choose foods that are less processed and more natural: organic foods are included as a part of this for both their association with alternative farming practices, as well as their lack of chemicals (Eden, 2011; Qazi & Selfa, 2005). The descriptions that portray untouched greenery and rural agricultural practices occur throughout the discussion of organic food. Planet Organic encourages this very notion with their definition of organic agriculture as a “holistic system of production that takes farming back to basics” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic?”). The use of the terminology “back to basics” allows for the consumer to visualize the simplicity of the farming, without an actual explanation of the methods used. Of course this imagery is descriptive in the form of text as well

as literal in the form of images in the websites and in-store. One specific example is the Thrifty's organics logo<sup>35</sup>. This image portrays what Cook, Reed and Twiner (2009) discuss in the description of organic foods being poetic and idealistic<sup>36</sup>. In a study of British organic food promotion, the authors found a recurring theme of words describing "non-industrial farming" such as "livestock", "pasture", "fields", "moorland", and "farmer", among many others (p. 156). In contrast to organic foods, Cook, Reed and Twiner (2009) found conventionally produced foods to use words that focused more on kitchen and indoor activities rather than outdoor/farming elements. Hence, the promotion of organic foods often involves the inclusion of ideal, natural farming methods.

This idea that there is a way food *should* taste again bridges two themes: that of simplicity/return to nature as well as the taste theme. While food appeals to our senses of touch, sight and smell, taste is the first and seemingly undeniable factor in food choice. There is a debate within the literature as to whether or not taste can be objectively determined and if organic foods in fact taste "better" (Bourdieu, 1984; Guthman, 2002; Guthman, 2003). In much of the supermarket content, the impression is that taste is objective. The claim that something "tastes better" is used often as a selling point for organic foods. For example, while Planet Organic does state that taste is an individual matter, they still don't hesitate to make claims that organic foods taste better and to confirm it by stating that chefs and consumers agree. Guthman (2002), as previously discussed<sup>37</sup>, argues that taste is in fact both individual and social. While some part of taste is certainly based on the physical sense and personal like and dislike, Guthman

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<sup>35</sup> See Figure 10.

<sup>36</sup> See page 14 for more on Cook, Reed & Twiner's (2009) discussion.

<sup>37</sup> See pages 17-21 in the *Commodified Tastes* section of the literature review for more on taste, and more on Julie Guthman's argument.

(2002) points out that there is also a *learned* part of taste: and the two can't be separated. Despite this notion, the content with regard to taste supports the impartial version in which taste is objective: working as a selling point and to their advantage, grocers can emphasize the seemingly neutral claim of taste. If it tastes better, it must be better.

The descriptive imagery used in the return to nature narrative also works to distinguish organic food from conventional food. The simplicity associated with organic foods becomes simple *in contrast to* conventionally produced foods (Eden, 2011; Fonte, 2008; Qazi & Selfa, 2005). Again with the “back to basics” phrase, the wording requires that the consumer acknowledge we are in a place or time where food production is *not* basic. Thus going “back” assumes that conventional foods are produced in a complex way that is not synonymous with organic food production. An example of this disassociation of organic from complex and modern farming methods can be found in the Planet Organic website. In their description of organic agriculture, they include a list that has been provided by the National Standard of Canada. This list does not define organic agriculture based on what it *is*, but rather, on what it is *not*: “[o]rganic agriculture: Prohibits synthetically-compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators and livestock feed antibiotics, Prohibits use of ionizing radiation in the preservation of food, Prohibits use of feed additives such as growth hormones, [and] Prohibits use of genetically-engineered or modified organisms” (Planet Organic, 2011, “Why Go Organic?”). This, again, emphasizes the need for a “back to basics” approach to food production by defining modern farming technology as harmful and organic agriculture as against these technologies.

The language of simplicity and of a return to nature specifically illustrates this organic idealism. Discussion of farming is often included in this theme (under the code “farming and growth”); along with the discussion of nature, the environment, purity, and a sense of “real-

ness”. Words such as “natural” and “whole” are used to describe organic foods; invoking – in poetic ways as previously discussed – images of roadside stands, rural farms and times gone by. Promoting the consumption of organic foods as a part of a larger environmental sustainability effort often required discussion of organic farming methods and how they differ from conventional farming methods. Often as a part of this “rural ideal”, organic farming methods were described in relative detail (within the perspective of a promotional text) so as to ground this ideal way of farming by discussing the practices that could make this a reality. For example, Thrifty Foods included a description of the organic method of pest control in their answer to the question “What is Organic?”: “Organic farmers rely on a diverse population of soil organisms, insects and birds to keep pests in check. Weeds are controlled through crop rotation, mechanical tillage and hand weeding, as well as through cover crops, mulches and other management methods” (Thrifty Foods, 2011, “Focus On Organic”). By discussing the specific ways in which organic farmers can control pests without the use of pesticides, Thrifty's is able to legitimate the notions attached to organic food production. In other words, the ideal becomes real. The notions of harmony, balance and nature are very much wrapped up in the description of the organic farming practices as well. Reason for this is illustrated well by Lampkin

Simplified, and put into a practical context, [organic farming] is the recognition that – within agriculture, as within Nature – everything affects everything else. One component cannot be changed or taken out of the farming or natural system without positively or adversely affecting other things. (as cited in Reed & Holt, 2006, 3).

Lampkin thus illustrates how very important these notions are to the practice of organic farming itself.

## Local Focus, Worldwide Growth

Within the context of local, organic and conventional producers, as discussed previously there was some support for the dichotomy pitting local and organic against large and mainstream producers. In Thrifty's answer to the question "Why does organic cost more?", they justify increased costs for organics by describing the organic industry as small and thus not able to take part in the more cost-effective mass production. While this may very well be the case, their description of the two farming methods divides them into either small-scale production or large-scale production, not leaving any room for middle-of-the-road farming techniques. And where do large organic farms fit in? Though the selected retailers range in terms of their size and focus on organic foods, the reproduction of this segregation between organic and conventional was apparent throughout the majority of the content. Even Planet Organic, a mid-size Canadian company with a focus on organic foods, seemed to reproduce notions of small organic farms in opposition to large government-subsidized farms. Though much of the literature documents the growth of the organic industry and debates its niche status (Bartels & Reinders, 2010; Fonte, 2008; Qazi & Selfa, 2005; Warner, 2005), the content analyzed does not reflect the changing nature of the organic food industry - with a few exceptions. This very fact shows the importance of marketing. Whether or not this dichotomy of small organic farms versus large conventional producers currently reflects the status of food production doesn't matter. What does matter is the way in which organic food can be distinguished from conventionally produced food.

The popularity of organic food in recent years has encouraged its growth to the point of mass-production. This is where there is overlap with Fonte's (2008) argument that local foods are no longer the "alternative" food system. The friction caused here between the organic ideals and the reality of the new organic food system is causing somewhat of a problem within the

website content. Thrifty's provides another example here. Directly after their answer to the question of higher costs for organic foods, which included the explanation that organics are produced on a small-scale and that there are a limited amount of organic foods – increasing costs, Thrifty's goes on to list the variety and amount of organic foods they carry. Thrifty's carries “the largest selection of certified organic products-including over 70 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables-of any grocery chain in British Columbia”, in addition to “over 400 organic grocery items throughout our stores” (Thrifty's, 2011, “Focus on Organic”). While it is apparent by the accessibility with which consumers can have access to organic foods and the amount of organic narratives produced by grocery stores that organic foods are not necessarily “small scale” (depending on the definition of small-scale versus large-scale food production), can one argue that the market still remains alternative? There is no clear answer in the content, but it certainly does point to *both*. The decrease in price from recent years (confirmed by Planet Organic), and the changing certification standards as addressed within the themes seem to point towards the ‘mainstreaming’ of the organic food market. On the other hand, descriptions of small scale farms and community connections seem to support, at least partially, the notion of organics as an alternative or niche market.

Fonte (2008) made the argument that in comparison to local foods (which she sees as the “new alternative” food group), organic foods have become much more conventional. My research both supports Fonte's (2008) argument as well as contradicts it. Among the websites I studied, organic foods were most often constructed as a part of a niche market. This conventionalisation was often discussed in the community theme, along with notions of small local farms with a lack of federal funding (see above paragraphs). In support of Fonte's (2008) organic conventionalisation are descriptions of expansion and increased affordability for organic

foods. These two factors seem to support the notion that organic foods have become more conventional and are more widely available and thus less costly. Safeway makes mention of this decreased cost and expansion, but only as a comparison to a previous version of the organic industry (it has grown, but it is still small). There is thus quite a bit of variety in answer to the question of the status of the organic food market.

What appears to emerge from the frequent discussion of the organic food market as niche/alternative and on a small scale is the sense of community. Within the theme I named “community” is a lot of discussion on the topics of trust and personal connection. While there are many elements that connect with the other themes that have already been discussed (such as organic as experience and the conflation of organic and local), some codes within this theme stand on their own. Witnessed especially within the Planet Organic and Saanich Organics content is the need for personal connection. Both emphasize the importance of being a part of the “organic community” and knowing the producers of your food. As if to stray away from conventional detachment from the origins of your food, these companies emphasize the importance of your involvement in and understanding of where your food comes from.

This emphasis on connection was obvious in my experiences shopping in Planet Organic as well as in their organic food discussion. Much like that which was discussed in relation to the Education and Information theme, Planet Organic staff were ready and willing to provide information on any organic food or product sold in store. The analysis of Saanich Organics also revealed much of this theme. Of course, as a company that offers only local, and with a purposefully small group (staff and circle of farmers), the community element is somewhat unavoidable. Yet, from what can be gained from their self-promotion, this small scale local operation is purposeful. With a firm belief in the importance of trusting those who farm your

food, and making a personal connection with everyone (including the person who delivers the box to your door), Saanich Organics makes a statement on what they think organic food production should look like.

This effort to encourage community ties and personal connection with your food producers is echoed by scholars looking to identify the reasons for the organic food movement. In support of a connection and a 'food education', Eden (2011) argues that there has been a movement away from large food corporations and food technologies that have blocked consumers' view of the true nature of their food commodity purchase (180). Qazi and Selfa (2005) also look at this connection in their analysis of organic food. They posit that the attempt to reconnect involves "[s]mall-scale farmers and "responsible eaters" ... looking for alternative ways to participate in a food system, ways that are outside the conventional distribution and marketing system, and that allow for greater local control over food" (Qazi & Selfa, 2005, p. 46). The question of the connection between the farmer and consumer thus becomes a key component to the organic food movement, as is illustrated by both Planet Organic and Saanich Organics.

### **Internal versus External Focus**

I speculated at the beginning that there were multiple narratives in support of organic food (which there indeed are), and that these narratives could be identified within the promotional material supplied by a variety of food retailers. The diversity of themes I identified within the selected content seems to grant these companies the ability to provide choice (or the appearance of choice) to consumers. This choice does not appear in the sense of multiple products (though of course this is also a part of it), but shows up in the form of granting consumers the ability and/or *responsibility* to sort through the multiple narratives and choose which will assist them in making their choice on whether or not to purchase organic foods.

The concept of internal versus external focus in the decision to consume organic foods, broached by Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006), works well within this context of multiple organic narratives. In addition, the notion that consumers are able to choose which are the most pertinent for them is apparent within this external versus internal orientation. Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006) stated that if a consumer has a more internal focus, their food choices would more likely be a reflection of that which affects them personally (i.e. personal health, cost, and so forth). In contrast, a consumer who has a more external focus would likely look to larger reasons with social impact. While I didn't use the internal versus external focus specifically within the initial stages of coding, by which I mean I did not label codes using the words "internal" and "external", it still applies and can actually be seen within the codes used. As previously discussed, Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006) divide consumers into those who have a more external focus and those who have a more internal focus when it comes to choosing their food. As a way to illustrate the relevance of this concept, I have included the table I used to outline the themes and codes I created with an additional column to illustrate their possible division into either an internal or external orientation (or both) based on the criteria provided by Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006)<sup>38</sup>.

**Table 2**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Internal/External*</b>
<b>Community</b>		<i>External</i>
	Importance of Trust	External
	Local	External
	Morality & Ethics	External
	Organic as Community Building	External
	Organic as Experience	Internal

<sup>38</sup> See page 16 for a review of this criteria, and more on the article produced for the OACC by Bonti-Ankomah & Yiridoe (2006).

	Personal Connection	Internal
<b>Individual Choice</b>		<i>Internal</i>
	Individualism	Internal
	*Personal Health*	Internal
<b>Cost</b>		<i>Internal/External</i>
	*Organics as Costly*	Internal/External
<b>Health</b>		<i>Internal</i>
	*Personal Health*	Internal
	*Medical/Technical Language*	Internal/External
<b>Education and Information</b>		<i>Internal/External</i>
	Organic Definition	Internal/External
	Importance of Education & Info	External
<b>Authenticity and Legitimacy</b>		<i>Internal/External</i>
	Certification	Internal/External
	Distinction between Natural & Organic	Internal/External
	Scientific Proof/Lack of	Internal/External
	Legitimacy & Authenticity	External
	Organic as Indicator of High Quality	External
	*Medical/Technical Language*	Internal/External
	*Importance of Education & Information*	Internal/External
	*Morality & Ethics*	External
<b>Safety</b>		<i>Internal/External</i>
	Exercise Caution	External
	Safety	Internal/External
<b>Simplicity/Return to Nature</b>		<i>External</i>
	Environmental Concern	External
	Colour Green	External
	Fresh	External
	Nature	External
	No Chemicals	Internal/External
	Farming & Growth	External
	Return to State of Nature	External
	Purity/Wholeness	Internal/External
	Sense of "Realness"	Internal/External
	Simplicity	Internal/External
<b>Taste</b>		<i>Internal</i>
<b>Government Involvement</b>		<i>External</i>
<b>Consumer Behaviour</b>		<i>N/A</i>

My concern when I first addressed this external versus internal concept was that it was oversimplified<sup>39</sup>. I think that a consumer can in fact use both internal *and* external factors to help them decide on an organic food purchase. This is illustrated in Table 3 as I saw many codes or themes could be both internal and external, depending on the reasoning used by the consumer.<sup>40</sup> For example, a consumer might choose organic tomatoes as a result of concern for their health *and* the environmental effects chemicals used in the growth of these tomatoes might have. In fact, I would argue that many of the organic narratives discussed aim to market organic food as beneficial for both the individual consuming the food *and* the food system/environment/society. In fact, Safeway supports this very notion in their answer to the question “Is organic better?”. After arguing that no research has shown organic produce to have an increased nutritive content in comparison to conventional produce, they state, “...people buy organic for reasons other than nutrient value. Organic produce is grown without commonly used pesticides and fertilizers, which could benefit *both* health and the environment” (Safeway, 2011, “The power of fruits and vegetables”, italics mine). Thus, I do think that this concept by Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006) is useful, but more so when the option of a consumer’s reasoning being *both* internal and external is included, rather than reducing it to an either/or decision. It draws the attention back to the fact that multiple narratives exist and that consumers may choose what factors they choose to include in their organic purchasing decision, or which store most encapsulates their food purchasing values.

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<sup>39</sup> See page 16 for more on this point.

<sup>40</sup> In fact, I would certainly say that there could be arguments made for the internal versus external element for many of these codes. The table I created is only meant as an illustration and I recognize that it may not account for all of the possibilities

Of course food choice is rarely as simple as a *personal* decision based on *personal* values. Decisions on which foods to purchase are also socially structured, just like tastes. As Guthman (2002) emphasizes, taste is “neither wholly structured nor wholly chosen” (298). Thus, while food choices may be influenced by personal preferences, they are also based on how food is marketed, made available/distributed, and legitimized. This is illustrated again by the internal versus external focus concept used by Bonti-Ankomah and Yiridoe (2006). An external focus can allow for a consumer to purchase foods as a result of social responsibility or efforts towards environmental sustainability. Thus, while food choice is often surmised as being something solely individual, it is in fact also social.

### **Multiple Narratives and Agency**

At the end of this analysis, in addition to the many small insights and illuminating facts gathered along the way, I come back and ask the question: what does it all mean? What are the implications? In the identification and analysis of multiple organic food narratives or themes, something I did not expect to be so useful came out of what was first an add-on to this thesis project: the company background information. Situating the companies in context and looking at how they came to be where they are and how they told the story of this history was surprisingly enlightening.

A closer look at history of the selected companies provided a glimpse into the company identities as illustrated by content discussing expansion efforts, chosen locations, company objectives and so forth. This content provided the necessary background to ground the organic narratives in their respective origins. In other words, it granted me a perspective on the necessary *agency* for a deeper understanding of the themes identified. While of course I cannot trace the

exact origin of each theme back to an “original source” (such as an original person, group or meeting), I can certainly posit that the food companies I have included within this analysis have all played a role in creating and distributing marketing themes for organic foods.

What I found to be the most notable differences between the companies’ organic food narratives stem from the content of the company histories. I briefly addressed these “identifying narratives” within the company history section, but as they directly relate to how each decides to market their organic foods, I will readdress them here. Each of the companies I selected to be a part of this project is different from the others. Two I categorized as “chain – mainstream” (Safeway, Inc. and Thrifty Foods), one as “chain – organic” (Planet Organic), and one as “local” (Saanich Organics). While the first two I put in the same category (chain-mainstream), I identified a surprising amount of differences between the two companies, based on their company history (obtained from their websites). Whether these differences were a result of the size and location of the company, or whether they were a part of intentional marketing (more likely the latter), the information provided on their respective websites illustrated the differences between the two.

These differences in company identity (as illustrated in table three) were most often illustrated in the stories of how they have since grown and expanded since the opening of the first store. For example, as I mentioned previously, Thrifty’s makes their location a central focus of their company identity. Regardless of the fact that Thrifty’s is only a part of a much larger company, their focus remains on the Thrifty’s chain itself and its existence in BC alone. In fact, the first few words written in the company history section on their website read, “locally operated and proudly Canadian Thrifty Foods” (Thrifty’s, 2011, “History”). Hence, Thrifty’s description of company growth has focused on the decision for the chain to stay BC-local. In

contrast, while still a relatively small chain of stores, Planet Organic discussed their ambitious growth across Canada and the acquisition of several other health and wellness related businesses in the last ten years.

In addition, even the store names serve as clues of how the company looks to portray themselves to the public. For example, the name “Thrifty Foods” (or “Thrifty’s” for short) very clearly brings to mind notions of cost and value. Thus, with regard to organic food, Thrifty’s acknowledges the cost of organic foods while simultaneously discussing how one does not need to sacrifice selection or value while paying less for what they offer. On another note, the name “Safeway” signifies one’s ability to trust the products offered by the company. As if in response to this idea of trust, Safeway continuously promotes organic foods by discussing (and sometimes questioning) their authenticity and legitimacy (see full discussion of this under the “health” theme). By providing this type of discussion, Safeway reassures the consumer and is able to promote their organic product line as something that is safe and authentic. This type of connection between “company context” and “company identity” is what I feel is important.

I must also acknowledge what one might call the “target audience”. As I’ve stated before, these promotional narratives do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they have agency and have not only been prepared and created by someone (in this case, a food company), but are geared towards a certain group of people: presumably, the typical clientele. The clientele for each store varies as a result of factors such as location, products carried, company reputation and so forth. Simply based on the number of stores (or the “reach” of the business in the case of Saanich Organics), one might presume that Safeway has the largest audience. Given that Safeway stores are all across North America, followed by Planet Organic across Canada (though with a limited number of locations), Thrifty’s in BC and Saanich Organics in the Greater Victoria area, the

company sizes and locations would affect the promotional narratives used. These differences and the most common themes identified within each company's website content are illustrated in the table on the following page.

**Table 3**

<i>Company name</i>	Safeway, Inc. <sup>41</sup>	Thrifty Foods <sup>42</sup>	Planet Organic <sup>43</sup>	Saanich Organics <sup>44</sup>
<i>Identifying narratives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Modern”</li> <li>-Growth/Achievement</li> <li>-“Commitment to value”</li> <li>-Offering a variety and specialty foods/products</li> <li>-Focus on shopping experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Local”</li> <li>-“Sustainable”</li> <li>-Customer Service</li> <li>-Competitive “Market leader”</li> <li>-Community-focused</li> <li>-Value without sacrifice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Commitment to organic and natural foods</li> <li>-Focus on shopping <i>experience</i></li> <li>-Health, wellness</li> <li>-Financial success</li> <li>-Provision of “quality products”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Small/local</li> <li>-Community-focused</li> <li>-Personal connection with farms/farmers</li> <li>-Quality foods</li> <li>-Commitment to organic certification</li> <li>-Variety</li> </ul>
<i>Most common theme(s)</i>	Health; Authenticity & Legitimacy; Taste; Simplicity/Return to Nature	Authenticity & Legitimacy; Simplicity/Return to Nature;	Cost; Health; Community; Safety; Simplicity/Return to Nature; Taste	Authenticity & Legitimacy; Community

Originally, my aim in analyzing the variety of themes that resulted from my content

analysis was focused on the themes themselves (what words are used, how do they overlap, can I see the multiple discourses identified by Lockie et al. (2002)) rather than their origins. Yet, after recognizing the importance of the context of these themes, I began to shift my focus from theme-

<sup>41</sup> Safeway, Inc. (2011). *History*. Retrieved April 23, 2011 from <http://www.safeway.ca/community/history.html> and Safeway, Inc. (2011). *Safeway in Canada history*. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.safeway.ca/community/history2.html>

<sup>42</sup> Thrifty Foods. (2011). *History*. Retrieved April 1, 2011 from <http://www.thriftyfoods.ca/EN/minor/about/history.html>

<sup>43</sup> Planet Organic. (2011). *Planet Organic Story*. Retrieved April 1, 2011 from <http://www.planetorganic.ca/goodfortheearth/planetorganicstory>

<sup>44</sup> Saanich Organics. (2011). *About*. Retrieved April 1, 2011 from [http://www.saanichorganics.com/?page\\_id=130](http://www.saanichorganics.com/?page_id=130)

centered to context-centered. Thus, the analysis of the organic food narratives centered less on how the food companies catered to what seemed to be previously existing narratives, but rather how the narratives resulted from the company context – the way in which these companies positioned themselves with relation to other food companies (within the context of market share, for example). In fact, my shift in thinking completely reversed! Instead of a view in which the narratives used to promote organics were inherent in how they are farmed and produced (in other words, based on the innate attributes of organic food), this analysis showed that the way in which organics were marketed in fact is more influenced by cultural themes. The company identities which result from these cultural themes consequently influence the advertising produced by the companies. The way in which I viewed organic food and the narratives used to promote them has thus changed to account for the influence of company identity.

I think that this shift underscores the importance of context in the production of discourse. In other words, while the narratives produced on organic foods are important in themselves, this research shows that in fact these narratives are a result of the context they come from. For example, Table 3 (p. 83) shows Saanich Organics' focus on community: both in their description of themselves as a company, as well as in my analysis of their organic food promotion. In contrast, while Planet Organic also promotes the community aspect of organic foods, factors such as cost and safety are primary.

## **Significance and Implications**

As mentioned at the very beginning of this analysis, Lockie et al. (2002) call what consumers face when entering into the world of organic foods a “dazzling array of competing

discourses” (37). While I can certainly see where this notion of a dazzling array would come from, as I found it to be true in the beginning stages of my study, I find that the series of “discourses” Lockie et al. (2002) refer to are less clean cut than they would have you think. Yes, there are a variety of ways in which organic foods can be marketed and there are significant differences between the themes in my analysis. Yet, for every difference accounted for, there is a similarity that ties the variety of discourses together. As I’ve illustrated in my analysis, while I saw eleven narratives come out of the content, these could be further grouped into four broad themes: the organic experience, going back to basics, a focus on local, and the internal versus external focus. Thus, I must question if I can truly conclude that I support Lockie et al.’s (2002) “dazzling array”. While at first glance it certainly does seem that there are a wide variety of narratives supporting organic food, in fact many of these narratives are simply a fraction of a larger theme. Also, as a result of what I see as important in the company identity and organic narratives in context, I feel that in fact this point also goes against the notion that these discourses are competing. While at one point I did see Lockie et al.’s (2002) argument and would have also agreed that the series of organic narratives were ‘competing’ in some ways, I would *now* argue that these narratives in fact often work together to create a stronger narrative which promotes the cultural themes a company wishes to portray.

This conclusion has led me to question what the implications might be of making this connection. I can say with some certainty that these organic narratives have political undertones – even if not in the most obvious of ways. Consumers purchase foods as a result of their nutritional needs, yes, *but* also as a result of internalized notions of how food should be consumed, the reason for choosing certain foods, and where to purchase food. Yet, the promotional narratives discussed put the responsibility of choice upon the consumer, rather than

showing the consumer as restricted in their food choices (one can only choose from products that are made available). Feuerbach's notion of "you are what you eat" fits well here. Chad Lavin (2009) describes this well in his discussion of the aforementioned notion: "[o]wning up to the realities of digestion, [Feuerbach] suggested, gives lie to the liberal ideals of sovereignty and autonomy, and reveals the human condition as one of vulnerability and dependence" (par. 1). As consumers, we are thus simultaneously shown what is culturally accepted as appropriate food to consume and told that we have both the right and responsibility to choose. Food choice can thus be viewed as a political act for the consumer. Lavin continues on to discuss how something that does not seem innately political can in fact be very political. He uses the example of American concerns over health, stating that "what is at stake is not so much health as the enduring viability of established conceptions of responsibility" (Lavin, 2009, par. 3). In other words, when considering health, within the content I have selected for example, I might also consider what narratives on the topic of health illustrate beyond physical health: such as the requirements of personal and social responsibility, as Lavin (2009) suggests. How might a consumer be influenced by these promotional narratives in a way that is not obvious at first glance?

With these notions of consumer choice in mind and with all I have learned about food as a result of this research, I would posit that *food is political*. Lavin (2009) does not seem to think we know how to separate politics and food. I would agree with Lavin (2009), though the politics are not always evident to the average consumer. In *Food Politics*, which I described earlier as a book that began my interest in sociology and food, Nestle (2007) found that the production and consumption of food was *innately* political. Looking to uncover the complex relationships of government, politics and food companies, Nestle (2007) goes so far as to compare the actions of food companies to the actions of tobacco companies. The difference between the two, however,

she narrows down to the simple fact that “promoting food raises more complicated issues than promoting tobacco...in that food is required for life and causes problems only when consumed inappropriately” (2). While Nestle does not negate the ability of individuals to make a political difference in their actions (such as in their food choices), she is also careful to include the social determinants when viewing consumer food choice. I think this is wise of Nestle (2007) and in fact demonstrates the smart sociological practice of understanding the relationship of the individual within a larger society.

## Conclusion

Often, when food has been studied within the realm of sociology, much of the focus has been on shortage, security and class (Reed & Holt, 2006). While these are still important elements of food culture to study, the complexity of the sociological aspects of food extend much further as social theorists have discovered in more recent years: specifically when it comes to organic foods. The evidence gathered within this research allows me to conclude that organic foods are, no doubt, currently on the forefront of consumer consciousness when it comes to food purchase and consumption. Whether or not a customer enters a supermarket and decides to purchase organic foods or makes the choice to sign up for a residential box program which delivers local organic fruits and vegetables to their doorstep, and despite the reasons for their decision, they are most likely aware of what organic foods are and the role they play in their food choices.

The presence of organic foods within supermarket promotion is undeniable. Chain grocery stores such as Thrifty's and Safeway have taken note of this and included not only organic foods within their stores, but discussion of organic foods on their websites (supplemented by in-store promotion). In addition, there has been the creation of stores and food programs (such as residential box delivery) with a focus on solely organic foods, such as Planet Organic and Saanich Organics. Through an analysis of the discourse related to organic foods on the websites and in-store promotion, from the four aforementioned companies, I looked to further explore the multiple narratives used in the promotion of organic food. The ten themes identified included: 'community', 'individual choice', 'cost', 'health', 'education and information', 'authenticity and legitimacy', 'safety', 'simplicity/return to nature', 'taste', and 'consumer behaviour'. These themes I was able to later reduce to four broad themes, including

the organic experience, going back to basics, a focus on local and the internal versus external focus.

The multiple narratives identified in the promotion and discussion of organic foods from only a few grocery stores initially seemed to indicate the complexity of what appeared as a cohesive food movement. Consumers are consistently presented with an over abundance of knowledge and information on what foods are best for them: for financial, ethical, health and environmental factors. These narratives do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are created and circulated by agents who, in the case of food, are in the industry. Growers, producers, and retailers make statements about organic food, and consumers pick up on that which is both intentionally and unintentionally distributed.

With the content analysis and company context in mind, I found that while there are both similarities and differences among the narratives used to promote organic foods, the key factor in determining which food companies choose which narratives actually lies in cultural values expressed through the company identities. The goals, values, culture and characteristics of a company (such as value, quality, presentation, and so forth) are more influential in how a store promotes organic foods than the “values” of the organic food industry itself. I don’t think I was alone as a consumer in making the assumption that the narratives really only stemmed from the organic foods and those who grow/produce them. Instead, as Cook, Reed & Twiner (2009) posit, when it comes to food marketing “corporations are perceived for what they are, and their language as an expression of that identity” (p. 170). Thus, as consumers, we may view the narratives used in the promotion of organic food as an outlet through which to view the culture of the company promoting them – rather than just an outline of the benefits of organics. In

addition, food is political. While it's a very simple conclusion, I feel that it's one of great importance. It has shifted my whole view of organic foods and related social movement(s).

While the continual global growth of what may be argued as a niche market continues, sociological investigation may in fact have to change gears. Arguments have been made by both academics and supermarkets that support organic farming and methods of production as the innovative 'way of the future' (Hughner et al., 2007; Parsons, 2005; Planet Organic, 2011; Saanich Organics, 2011). In the context of increasing environmental damage, concern, and efforts towards sustainable practices, organic production may in fact expand much beyond what was once considered a small alternative food movement (Reed & Holt, 2006). A part of this expansion can be seen in the Planet Organic stores, who carry not only a variety of organic foods, but also market things such as supplements, beauty products and household cleaners. If the movement toward organics continues on the same path it has been, the future of food may be very different indeed.

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