

An Inquiry into the Pecking Order:
The British Columbia Egg Scheme and the Yoking of Sustainable Egg
Producers

By

Jessica Duncan
B.A. (Honours), Bishops University, 2004

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In the spring of 2005, a Vancouver Island Health Authority Inspector tried to stop the sale of ungraded eggs at the Saltspring Island Farmers' Market. This event, and the actions that followed, came to be known as the "Saltspring Island egg wars." Using the egg wars as a starting point, I explore the inner workings and contradictions of the egg sector in British Columbia by asking the question "how is it that food grown locally in sustainable ways is seen to be less safe by regulatory food regimes than food produced in the industrial food system?" To do this I take up the standpoint of egg farmers who "farm otherwise." From this grounding I rely on the insights of these farmers, civil servants, and social theorists Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Dorothy Smith to understand the ordering of power, knowledge and the social in relationships between sustainable egg producers and the British Columbia egg scheme.

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Introduction

It was a typical Saltspring Island spring day, tranquil and wet; the kind of day that makes you feel like a real West Coaster. I headed down Juniper Road to the aptly named Juniper Farms.¹ I turned right into its driveway, trying my best to elude the rain-filled potholes as I drove up to the first barn and stopped. There was an old white horse and a bay pony wandering in one of the fields. Through the misty curtain of rain I could see a small herd of sheep a few hundred feet away. I grabbed my raincoat and noticed how the sheep carried on; they appeared oblivious to the weather. As soon as I had mustered up the courage to leave the comfort of the dry van, Michelle's husband pulled up in his white pick-up. He told me to head up to the house: "second house on the right, pass the chickens and turn into the driveway. She is up there with the kids; she's expecting you." I continued up the hill, past the bunnies and the chicken coup, to the second house. As I pulled up, four large dogs emerged from the house and surrounded the van. I parked and walked with my escorts to the house. I turned back and looked at the preening chickens in their pen. The hens scratched for worms and other delectables. They clucked and cooed and scurried about.

The five of us were invited inside. I sat with Michelle at her kitchen table. We drank strong black coffee out of mismatched mugs from Christmases and Mothers' Days past. I asked about her farm, about her laying hens, and about how many hens she had.

¹ The name of this farmer has been changed and the place has been modified to protect their anonymity. Throughout this thesis, I use real names when referring to participants unless they have requested to remain anonymous. The Human Ethics Research Board approved this. There is not a large accessible population of farmers actively involved in this debate. As well, the majority of the farmers that I talked to had established public personas around the issue of egg inspection and marketing: they have been cited at length in newspapers and magazines and have appeared on radio programs. I made sure that my participants were all clear that I would be using their real names and at the end of the consent form, I reiterated this important point with a written request for an affirmation or rejection of the following statement: "I agree to let Jessica use my real name, real location and real job title in her research."

“Somewhere in the range of one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy” she replied. She sells the eggs at her farm stand and to a local store and estimates that her hens produce about ten dozen eggs a day. Though it is left unsaid, Michelle and I are both keenly aware that she is breaking the law. In fact, Michelle is challenging two laws. With over one hundred laying hens and no quota, she is in violation of the BC Egg Marketing Standing Orders. Moreover, by selling ungraded eggs to a local garden store, she is contributing to more illegal activity: the sale of ungraded eggs beyond the farm gate.

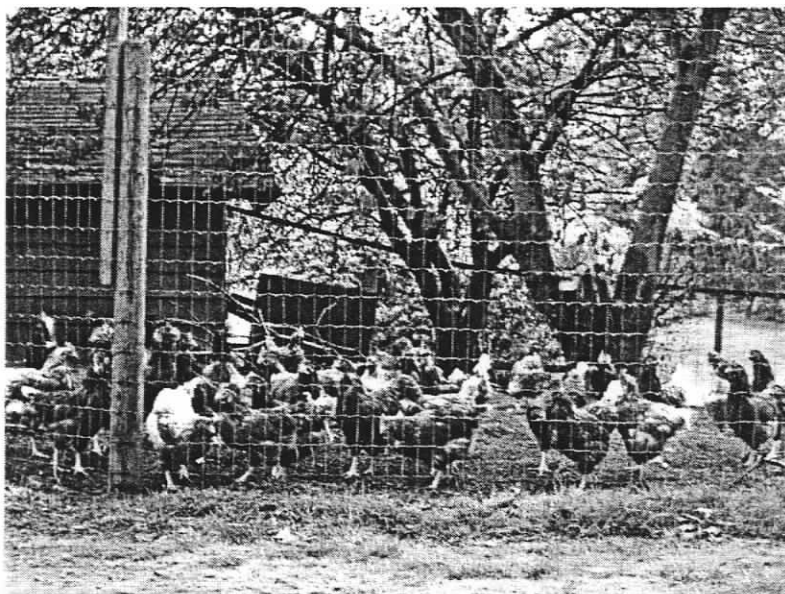


Figure 1: Chickens at Juniper Farm

Michelle is by no means the only farmer who engages in such activities: these are in fact common practices amongst BC egg farmers. So why do so many farmers consciously flout the law? For many, the current system reeks of bureaucratic micromanagement. For others the system actively contradicts the guiding ethics and ideologies that inform their practice. Some have no other way of selling their eggs and securing income.

Over the last two years I have had the opportunity, through work and leisure, to travel throughout the province of British Columbia. I have held friends as they cried over the termination of a lease on land they had spent three years farming, because the owner wanted to downsize and the land was now worth millions. I have spoken to farmers on several of the Gulf Islands and listened with a sinking heart as they explained how they have stopped growing food for the local farmers markets. "Growing food," they told me, "doesn't pay the bills." Instead they tend small plots for themselves and their families and have taken to growing flowers. You can't eat flowers but they certainly sell faster, more easily to tourists, and for a better profit than zucchini. I have shared a meal with farmers in Burns Lake and considered the fallout from the Mountain Pine Beetle: the opportunities for new grazing pastures and the frustration over provincial meat regulations that significantly restrict their ability to move forward with such plans.

Over and over, sustainable farmers² have told me that instead of promoting the production of healthy and safe food, the current regulatory system is actually

² I have spent a great deal of time trying to determine an appropriate way to describe the group of farmers whose standpoint I take up in this thesis. Not only is this a very diverse group, but also, the words that are commonly used to describe how they farm (for example, local, ecological, organic, small-scale) are laden with social and political implications that have the potential to detract from what it is that I am trying to get at. I have decided to refer to this broad group of farmers as "sustainable farmers." There is great difficulty in defining sustainability, as a number of people and organizations have taken up the term with varied understandings of what it means. Sustainability is a word that is laden with myriad implications. However, I have opted to use the word because it speaks to a type of farming that self-consciously puts ideas of ecological and social sustainability (including social justice issues) as well as economic considerations at the centre of its orientations. Many of the farmers who I refer to as sustainable would not have been sustainable, if assessed rigorously by those "tests" (especially the economic ones). But, it is a goal towards which they are working and to which they are committed. Sustainable agriculture integrates three goals: environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity and has a focus on the stewardship of ecological/natural and human resources. The concept of sustainability embraces the principle of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Feenstra *et al.* 1990). Many ecological and sustainable farming organizations are developing an operationalized understanding of sustainable that is far more specific and rigorous and assessed in present time rather than with reference to the future (see for example COABC's "About Us" page (<http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/about.htm>), Canadian General Standards Board's report "Organic Production Systems: General Principles and Management Standards" (http://www.pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html)).

undermining the very farming systems that produce such foods.³ It is this disconnect between the stated goals (safe and healthy food systems) and the outcomes (concentrated, industrial⁴ production and a dependence on imports) of food-related policies in Canada that has attracted me to this research. How is it that a government system designed to promote food safety promotes policies that discourage, even destroy, healthy food systems?

When it comes to eggs, the rise of the particular regulatory regime the farmers above work within can be explained partly by bureaucratic notions of food safety and health, and partly by the complex roles of the Canadian agricultural products marketing system. The explanation also lies in the current structure of the food and agriculture system in Canada in which powerful economic interests and elite network play an important part. In this thesis I hone in on a small section of the Canadian agricultural system that is local to where I live in order to understand an apparent contradiction: eggs produced locally, on sustainable farms, are deemed less safe (by law makers and civil servants at least) than those produced and marketed by the industrial process. This system remains in place while evidence that the industrial food system has negative implications for human health and what one might call the health of the planet continues to mount

³ For example, members of the Meat Inspection Enhancement Strategy, set up to deal with the new meat inspection regulations, have told me that they estimate over fifty percent of small-scale meat producers have quit in anticipation of new regulations to be brought down September 2007. These regulations were originally slated to come into effect in September 2006 but their enforcement was postponed.

⁴ Industrial farming is an umbrella term that refers to the scale and the operating characteristics of industrialized farms (Lobao 2000:4). See appendix A for a glossary of key terms.

(Lang & Heasman 2004; Horrigan *et al.* 2002; Vandermeer 1995; Wilson, 1991; Soule *et al.* 1990; Poincelot 1986; Widdowsom, 1981).⁵

Overview of the BC Egg Sector

The regulatory framework built up around egg production is complicated. For example, complexity arises from tensions in federal and provincial jurisdiction. Food production is a provincial responsibility but inter-provincial trade and international trade is a federal responsibility. At the provincial level there is also split jurisdiction between production and food safety inspection. As well, the BC Egg Marketing Board manages the quantity of production and the marketing of eggs in BC. On the ground, this plays out as follows. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency upholds federal regulations that include grading standards. Anyone wishing to sell eggs inter-provincially or internationally must have their eggs graded by a federally registered grading station. The BC Ministry of Agriculture and Land (BCMAL) regulates the sale of graded and ungraded eggs within the province. They have determined that eggs sold at the farm gate do not need to be graded but that all eggs sold off farm or for commercial use must be graded. This places these eggs under the auspices of the federal regulations and consequently the CFIA.

Currently, the BCMAL has no field staff enforcing these regulations. The BCMAL and CFIA used to have what one industry specialist called a “gentleman’s agreement” where the CFIA would enforce the provincial regulations. However, these

⁵ For a comprehensive review of the negative environmental impacts of the industrial poultry industry in British Columbia’s Fraser Valley see Marcia Helen Thomson’s 2004 Masters Thesis titled “An Agrosustainable/Foodshed Study of the British Columbia Poultry Industry’s Manure Management Practices: A Case Study of the Sustainable Poultry Farming Group” Master of Soil Science UBC, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences.

two organizations are currently negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is proceeding at a slow pace and there remains some ambiguity with respect to the CFIA's role in enforcing the provincial regulations. BC Health Inspectors come in to the mix when they find eggs that do not conform to their definition of healthy or safe. The Inspectors are expected to notify the CFIA who send out field officers to follow up on the case. The BC Egg Marketing Board's role is to direct a market access system: they seek to control the number of eggs produced to ensure stable markets through the distribution of quota. All egg producers in the Province are expected to follow the BCMAL's regulations when it comes to grading and selling.

For generations, in Canada, grading has been efficiently and effectively done on farm by farm women, and it is a fairly simple process. Now eggs destined for sale beyond the farm gate must be taken to a government approved and inspected facility. Some processors have set up and registered on-farm grading stations, requiring the purchase of government standard equipment and a minimum annual fee of one-hundred and thirty-five dollars. The fee is paid to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.⁶ If a farmer wishes to have her/his eggs inspected on location, the inspection equipment will cost them at least fifteen thousand dollars a year. Most farmers are unwilling and unable to establish their own grading facility and must sell their eggs to grading stations if they wish to market them off the farm. In BC there are currently only thirty-three federally registered egg stations.⁷ According to BC Egg Marketing Board data, there are one hundred and

⁶ Serious criticisms have been made of the CFIA, accusing them of having the primary mandate of protecting industrial producers. I explore the CFIA in more detail in the section titled "The only people that can afford to handle that level of bureaucracy and paper work are the big boys" (page 59).

⁷ There are four grading facilities on Vancouver Island (Nanaimo, Victoria, Duncan and Ladysmith), fifteen facilities in the Fraser Valley/Fraser Canyon, four in Northern BC and nine in the interior.

thirty two registered egg producers⁸ (i.e., producers with quota) in BC with over 2.3 million layers. These layers produce 54 million dozen eggs. BCEMB data also underscore that on average conventional egg producers have seventeen thousand laying hens confined to cages.⁹ The BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands estimates that ninety five to ninety eight per cent of all eggs produced in BC come from the one hundred and thirty two registered producers. The remaining two to five percent of BC eggs are produced by small backyard or unregistered flocks and it is these producers that I particularly interested in.

Positioning My Work: Food Politics and Food Sovereignty

My MA thesis is about food politics. Popular interest in food politics has seen much growth over the last decade. With the success of food-related books and films (e.g., Eric Schlosser's book-turned-movie *Fast Food Nation*, the documentaries *Super-Size Me* and *Deconstructing Supper*), recent food scares (in Canada, most notably, BSE, E. coli O157:H7 and Avian Influenza), the rise in consumer demand for local and organic produce and the so-called "obesity crisis," the intricacies and rhetoric of food politics have emerged as part of our vernacular. To define food as a political object is to draw "attention to the fact that many relations that are constituted by and through the medium of food are also power relations and should be analysed as such" (Lien 2004:9).

⁸ There are ninety-six registered producers in the Fraser Valley, fifteen on Vancouver Island and twenty one distributed across the rest of the province.

⁹ In BC, basic housing requirements for hens are outlined in the BC Egg Marketing Board Standing Orders. The Standing Orders clearly outline the *minimum* requirements that producers must provide for their layers. The Orders provide a chart that determines the space needed for a hen based on weight and age in weeks. Birds are not to be caged in areas less than 20 cm wide by 40 cm deep. Birds sharing a cage cannot be kept in space smaller than 30 cm wide by 40 cm deep. This is a major point of contention with organic farmers who are uncomfortable with, if not fundamentally opposed to paying levies to an organization that endorses such claustrophobic living conditions for hens.

Marianne Lien (2004:9) argues that limiting research to “policies, bureaucracies and politicians” is too narrow an approach to “grasp significant issues and changes.” Rather, politics, like food, must be seen as “embedded in social practice, discourse, controversy and conventions that are not always labelled political” (Lien 2004:9). By highlighting some of the less obvious ways in which food is politicised, we can contribute to “a more nuanced understanding of both politics and food” (Lien 2004:9).

At the global level, the politics of food production and trade are being made visible in ways that are politically mobilizing through the food sovereignty movement. Food sovereignty emerged from the resistance of peasant farmers in the Global South to the industrialisation of agriculture. The food sovereignty movement frames its resistance to a globalizing food system in terms of local (primarily peasants and Indigenous) peoples’ ability to define their own food systems, to produce food locally, to save seeds, to consume culturally appropriate food and to engage in a fair system of global trade. To be clear, I am not suggesting that localised production and local food is by default better than food produced extra-locally. Rather, the turn to local is a position being taken up as a grounds from which to reclaim some control of the food system. Branden Born and Mark Purcell (2006) caution unreflective faith in the local (see also Hinrichs 2003 and Winter 2003). Indeed, given geo-political realities when it comes to the production, processing and distribution of food globally, the answer cannot be as simple as shifting to local production. Such shifts will inevitable have negative ramifications for people in countries who have shifted their economies to produce food for global export. As I explore later in this thesis, local is not the end goal but a greater focus on local production is part of the strategy by which we can achieve food sovereignty.

Different struggles in different places are seen as connected and identified as part of a global struggle over food sovereignty. The food sovereignty movement presents a direct challenge to neoliberalism and to the dominant industrial agricultural system that has not improved the lives of people as originally promised. The great strength of food sovereignty is that its roots are simultaneously embedded in the local and the global. The Via Campesina, an international movement that coordinates peasant organizations of small and medium sized producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities from Asia, America, and Europe, has been the torch bearer of this movement, cultivating many of the key spokespersons and helping to integrate a widely dispersed series of actions and events into a social movement.

By placing my work within the discourse of food sovereignty I am recognizing that local struggles around sustainable farming are also global struggles and vice versa. The focus of my research is localised and the concrete situation and details of the struggle cannot be generalized to the majority of the world's farmers whose struggles, although interconnected, are always contextually specific. Indeed, there is a lot of ambiguity between what has been termed "the global" and "the local." Local struggles take place in a global context. Local action has global consequence, in the same way that global action can have local consequence. We must be cognisant of this and actively resist creating local/global binaries. That being said, I believe that a local focus is imperative because it is here, in various local sites, that what can be analyzed abstractly as global forces (or what Dorothy Smith calls 'extra-local relations') play out. Being grounded in the local while recognizing the extra-local dimensions of one's subject of inquiry is especially important when undertaking agricultural research (Lawrence *et al.* 1999). This approach

also provides a better way of determining locally specific solutions, keeping in mind that local is not the goal. Rather the goal is to forward a just and sustainable food system (Born & Purcell 2006).

Food sovereignty is a particularly apt way of framing this thesis. It is a movement that maintains the prerogative of people to define their own food systems. As I see it, food security – simply defined as adequate access to healthy, culturally appropriate food – is the end goal. However, the organizations and people who currently control the dominant systems of food production uphold a very different understanding of food security than I do. Furthermore, within government and often at the community level (most notably in urban areas) efforts to address issues of food security have stopped at the level of distribution and very little is being done to ensure and promote production. Food sovereignty, therefore, is the approach that farmers and food activists are now using in our efforts to regain control over our food systems so that we may eventually achieve food security. I understand the achievement of food sovereignty for local farmers as a key component of sustainable food systems.¹⁰ The farmers I have spoken with tell me that they do not have food sovereignty. So when I state that this thesis is about food sovereignty, I mean that it is about securing and ensuring the ability of farmers to raise chickens in a way that is respectful to the animals, to the farmer, to the local community and to the earth.

¹⁰ As Gregory *et al.* (2005:2141) note “[t]here are several definitions of what constitutes food systems each formulated in relation to a specific range of issues (e.g. globalization of the agri-food system, Goodman 1997; community food systems, Gillespie & Gillespie 2000; ecological interests, Francis *et al.* 2003).” I consider food systems to encompass the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food. They include components of: “(i) food availability (with elements related to production, distribution and exchange); (ii) food access (with elements related to affordability, allocation and preference) and (iii) food utilization (with elements related to nutritional value, social value and food safety)” (Gregory *et al.* 2005:2141).

As I noted above, in this thesis I take up an inquiry into the system of egg production in British Columbia in order to understand an apparent disjuncture: eggs produced locally, on sustainable farms, are deemed less safe (by law makers and civil servants at least) than those produced and marketed by the industrial process. As part of my inquiry I will look closely at the social processes and practices organizing the lives of sustainable egg farmers in BC so as to understand how extra-local relations of ruling shape their everyday experiences. My inquiry starts at the point where this bizarre contradiction came home to me with unavoidable clarity, one spring day when a local health inspector tried to stop the sale of ungraded eggs at the Saltspring Island Farmers' Market.

Chapter 1

My Site of Inquiry: The Saltspring Island Egg Wars¹¹

In the spring of 2005, Greg Dunphy, an Environmental Health Officer with the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), received a letter complaining that uninspected eggs were being sold at the Saltspring Island Farmers' Market. Dunphy notified Saltspring Island Market Coordinator Mathew Coleman and the Saltspring Island Parks and Recreation Committee of the "illegal" sales. Selling ungraded¹² eggs beyond the farm gate is an infringement of Section 3 of the 1978 *Agricultural Produce Grading Act* Shell Egg Grading Regulation.¹³

In response to the complaint, the Market Coordinator issued a cease-selling edict on uninspected eggs that came into effect Saturday, May 21, 2005, but the order was issued to no avail. That Saturday farmers woke up early, packed up their eggs and arrived at the market; some even brought their own farm gates to set up at the market, behind

¹¹ The term "egg wars" was a term coined by local media (see Knox 2005; Sherrin 2005a) to describe the events that transpired at the Saltspring Island Farmers' Market where the Vancouver Island Health Authority tried to stop the sale of ungraded eggs, apparently for health reasons. I am not completely comfortable with the application of the term "war," but I have opted to use the term for a few key reasons. First, on Saltspring Island, the events are talked about as the "egg wars." Second, the term is catchy and has proved useful in terms of engaging with people who are keen to learn know more about what an "egg war" is. Third, the term implies a struggle between two sides: in this case, sustainable egg farmers versus the marketing and inspection systems. Finally, the term "war" is used by Tim Lang and Michael Heasman (2004) to describe a situation wherein food policy is in crisis. What transpired last spring on Saltspring Island was and continues to be a food war: a battle over policy.

¹² Grading is process of inspection. In grading eggs, the factors of interior quality, weight, cleanliness and shell construction are considered. Ungraded and uninspected are synonymous in this thesis.

¹³ Section 3 states:

3 (1) No person shall, for the purpose of reselling them, purchase or otherwise obtain ungraded eggs from a producer without a valid and subsisting license to purchase ungraded eggs.

(2) No person shall sell, offer for sale or process ungraded eggs or send or convey them from one place to another other than

(a) a producer sending or conveying eggs produced on his farm to an egg station or an egg product station, or

(b) with the prior written approval of a producer, an egg station sending or conveying ungraded eggs received by it from the producer to an egg product station for processing.



Figure 2: Agricultural Land Map, Salt Spring Island, comparing homesteads to contemporary farm lands (Harrington & Stevenson, 2005)

which they planned to sell their eggs. And so, farmers continued to sell their eggs at the Market and when Coleman (who was ordered by VIHA to confiscate the eggs) came down to the market, he took no eggs, only photographic evidence.

Residents and non-residents alike were left wondering who would have complained and on what grounds? Saltspring actively promotes its 'alternative culture' image, its 'difference' and its population of independent farmers and self-sustaining artists. Indeed, this identity is part of the Island's economic success as a tourist destination. Put another way, funkiness and alternative, if not counter culture and quaint, farmers and the farmers' market are part of Saltspring's identity. And this is not a new phenomenon on the Island. In her review of Saltspring Island, Ruth Sandwell (2005) explains that historically, residents of the Island "demonstrated a notable antipathy to ... formal kinds of social organization usually identified with the growth of community and state in the nineteenth century, including the growth of state-run institutions such as municipal government and schools" (Sandwell 2005:223). Sandwell (2005:223) suggests that if residents' "active antipathy towards formal social structures and modern institutions was made possible by settlers' relative economic independence, it was rendered desirable... by the existence of a distinct rural culture on the island." Almost one hundred and fifty years after the Island was first settled, it came as a shock to residents that someone would complain about the sale of ungraded eggs at the Market. Indeed it is not known publicly who sent the complaint about the sale of ungraded eggs, but the general feeling on Saltspring Islands is that the letter was sent by a non-resident.



Figure 3: Harry Warner, Saltspring Island Farmer, Activist, Basket Maker and Musician, selling his eggs behind a 'farm gate' at the Market

More specifically, Saltspring farmers were initially in disbelief with news of the cease-selling edict. There is no grading facility available to farmers on Saltspring Island and the demand for their eggs certainly outweighs their supply. As Harry Warner (who does not sell at the market) explained to me, on days that he visits the market:

I sell all of my eggs before I even get to the market. People stop me in the street asking me for my eggs. I don't have enough eggs to supply the local demand.

Harry's eggs are ungraded. Indeed, across the Province, the regulations concerning the grading of eggs are rarely enforced, expressing perhaps the common-sense recognition that the letter of the law does not always capture the intention of the law which was designed to regulate large-scale industrial production and distribution, to promote orderly marketing and trade, and ensure consumer protection where the link with the producer is distant. One Saltspring Island egg-farmer advocate understands that "those [grading] laws

have been put in place for larger barns, not for people with 10-15 chickens” (Sherrin 2005a: 3).

According to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), it issues the stoppage on the sale of ungraded eggs at the market because, from its perspective the eggs present a health risk. According to VIHA, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and the BC Egg Marketing Board, ungraded eggs are a health risk. In a letter to the Saltspring Island Farmers’ Markets, Brent Warner, Industry Agritourism Specialist at the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and secretary of the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA), confirmed that indeed eggs are not allowed to be sold at the Farmers’ Market unless they are graded and these rules are set by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and enforced in different ways by the Ministry, the CFIA, the Marketing Boards or local Health Authorities.

Maxine Marchenski, Senior Environmental Health Officer with the Vancouver Island Health Authority invoked the spectre of dirt and disease as she explained that “with free-range eggs there is a greater chance of salmonella because of what the chickens eat. They are free to roam and ingest bird and rodent droppings” (Sherrin 2005a:A3). She offered no data, however, to support the claim that ungraded eggs sold at Farmers’ Markets in BC are a health risk or that there is a greater number (or indeed any) cases of illness from such ‘illegal’ eggs. How, one might ask, did Maxine figure large egg producers handle the very serious risk of rat infestations that inevitably occur when large amounts of chicken feed is stored? Farmers wondered if Maxine had ever spent any time in industrial scale chicken facilities. In contrast to the extensive literature documenting the individual and planetary ‘health’ benefits of sustainable farming and the

health costs of the industrial food system (see for example Lang and Heasman 2004; Horrigan *et al.* 2002; Vandermeer 1995; Wilson 1991; Soule *et al.* 1990; Poincelot 1986; Widdowsom, 1981), Vancouver Island's Senior Health Officer assured her public that the 'safe' alternative is industrialized agriculture. Sustainable producers' eggs were dangerous, according to the Health Authorities, it seemed.

Paul Minvielle, self-styled egg-regulation watch-dog, rejects the Health Authority's view. Eggs from local farms are likely safer than inspected eggs from factory farms. He states that "there hasn't been a problem with an uninspected egg in this province for as long as I can remember and that's a quarter century" (Sherrin 2005b: A3). Minvielle continues that, in his view, the "only problem [with contaminated eggs] ... came from an inspected, regulated source" (Sherrin 2005b: A3). Health Canada has only reported one food-borne disease outbreak related to eggs in the past ten years. Approximately fifty lower-mainland customers were affected by salmonella poisoning in August 2000 from baked goods contaminated with egg shells. The outbreak involved not uninspected eggs from a sustainable local farm but graded eggs from a federally inspected farm in Chilliwack (a report by the Public Health Agency of Canada on this issue is available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/05vol31/dr3107ea.html>).

Saltspring Island Farmers explained that, in their view, government-inspected industrial agriculture created the conditions that led to mad cow disease and avian flu, as well as the laws that restrict animals of all kinds to cramped, claustrophobic conditions. For many farmers, keeping animals in confined industrial conditions is not only

inhumane but it is also unsanitary and poses human health risks. To them, the ‘rules’ regulate in favour of risky behaviour.

The health and disease prevention accounts provided to explain the “crack down” on local egg are implausible to people in the sustainable farming and health food movement. What was I to make of the egg wars on Saltspring Island? Had the informal two-stream regulatory system that had been in effect for years – through the non-policy of non-enforcement – not been effective? Not only that, but they had far better traceability. After all, if someone were to fall ill from eating one of their eggs, due to the direct link between consumer and producer, there would be no doubt as to where the eggs came from. But, no one was getting sick, so why the crack-down on local eggs?

Further inquiry did indeed reveal that consumer health was not the only impetus for attempting to restrict ungraded egg sales, and this was recognized within other branches of government. For example, Stewart Paulson, Poultry Industry Specialist with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, admits the reasons for the structure of the egg regulations is not only consumer safety, but also what he called “market equity” (Logan 2005:1). Paulson was referencing lost revenue to the BC Egg Marketing Board and the Province. By his estimate, small-farm and backyard flocks make up three to five percent of the egg market in BC. This represents what he conservatively estimates as 4.8 million dollars in sales that go unregulated by the Province (Logan 2005:1, see also Paulson, 2004). However, Paulson’s comments highlight another key point. It is the BC Egg Marketing Board that is pushing to extend the application of their regulations to all producers, regardless of size. From the perspective of some large scale producers and the BC Egg Marketing Board market equity means having one set of regulations applied

across the sector. As well, if sustainable farmers were forced have their eggs graded before they could sell them, the BCEMB would capitalize off of the levies. On the ground, however, this would increase the already high cost of raising hens sustainably and this cost would likely be passed on to the consumer. As well, the eggs would enter into a system that contradicts the ethics and common sense of many of sustainable farmers.

In the wake of the egg wars, with mounting public awareness and pressure in support of small farmers' right to sell their eggs, the Vancouver Island Health Authority undertook a temporary re-evaluation of the Egg Standing Orders and a temporary agreement emerged. The temporary 'agreement' views the farmers' market as an extension of the farm gate. As a result, farmers may sell ungraded eggs at the Market as long as they are clean, uncracked, kept at temperatures of 4 degrees Celsius or lower and labelled 'uninspected'. It is VIHA's contention that these measures are necessary for protecting public health. It is the farmers' contention that apart from the labelling, they had been following similar good practices all a long.

John Wilcox is a farmer on Saltspring Island and is well known in farming and land-use circles across BC. John operates Duck Creek Farm, a 15-acre farm where he cultivates vegetables, herbs, and fruit trees and raises several species of birds. He also writes articles and manages a very active listserv. I asked John about the eggs wars and VIHA's decision to re-evaluate the by-law. He offered the following response:

They were shutting people out of the local market, reportedly for health reasons... Health comes to bear on the issue as well agricultural legislation comes to bear on it – the same legislation under which the Farm Industry Review Board and supply management is operating under. And so they start imposing laws, or enforcing laws that were already on the books about people not being allowed to sell outside the farm. And, they tried to

shut people down. But there was such a furor about it that the Health Authority backed down and said they could sell at the market under certain circumstances: if you tell people that they are ungraded, you wash them, and you do things like this. And so the health people adopted that standard and allowed us to operate here [on Saltspring] at the one market that way. However, that is still against [the Ministry of] Agriculture's law. But Agriculture isn't enforcing their law, so people got away with doing it. . . So the problem hasn't been resolved, because although the Health Authority has backed off from imposing their regulations . . . the Ministry of Agriculture's regulations haven't changed at all. It is still illegal to do what health is now allowing. And, it kinda points to the problem that we face in agriculture. . . They are making farming almost next to impossible to do these days.

According to a Parks Operations and Project Manager at the Saltspring Island Parks and Recreation Commission,

The matter [the egg wars] basically became a non-issue after a few weeks and after the media lost interest. The Ministry of Agriculture decided to rule that farm vendors in the Market were an extension of farm-gate sales, which are already a permitted activity. This is conditional on the farm vendors marking the egg containers to ensure that customers are aware that the eggs are not graded or inspected... The matter has not been an issue this year.

However, many farmers disagree. Saltspring Island farmer Harry Warner contends that the new labelling requirements are simply "government interference" (Knox 2005:C1). Urban-based commentators (including some academic researchers) interpret anti-government comments like Harry's as an expression of the rugged individualism if not right wing libertarianism. But many sustainable farmers view Harry's comments as reasonable and accurate. Far from being an idyllic oasis of individualism, sustainable farming in BC is highly regulated in ways that make little sense to sustainable farmers. Farmers that I spoke to do not resist regulations, but rather government interference that materialises in the form of government acting on the side of powerful economic interests and not on behalf of the majority of citizens.

Contrasting John and Harry's experiences as local farmers to the account offered by the Parks Operations and Project Manager is instructive. From the latter's perspective, the issue around the sale of ungraded eggs had been resolved: case closed. However, for farmers, the temporary reinterpretation of the Standing Orders has not solved the problem. As John explains, the system is complex and to understand what happened that Saturday at the Saltspring Island Farmers' Market we need to look beyond the bylaw enforcer, past the local Health Authority actors and investigate both the structures and ideologies that organise the production of eggs in Canada.

Local Egg War has Extra-Local Roots

To do this, it is important that I first outline my theoretical and methodological paradigm in order to elucidate my understanding of the construction of the social. I do this to clarify my own understanding of the broader political system within which my localised analysis takes place. My theoretical perspective frames my localised inquiry and it also allows me to engage with extra-local forces that come to bear significantly on the local. This perspective is shaped by understandings of hegemony and passive revolution which I take from Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. My perspective has also been heavily influenced by the work of French social theorist Michel Foucault on power. Dorothy Smith provides a very useful way of conceptualizing structural power and economic relations in a way that does not reify them. Smith understands ruling as a way to understand how power is exercised in local settings to accomplish extra-local interests. Applied to the egg wars, we see how the extra-local interests of large corporate interests are exercised on local egg farmers through policies and regulations activated by civil servants. I bring these conceptual resources to my analysis of the Saltspring Island egg

wars, but my analysis is grounded in the experiences of sustainable farmers like those I mentioned earlier in this chapter. So it is from this broader understanding of the social, with my feet on the local ground, that I start my interrogation of the relations of ruling that govern the work of sustainable egg farmers. Specifically, in the next chapter I examine the primacy of a neoliberal ideology and its application in ways that maintain the interests of elite networks in agriculture. Within this hegemonic arrangement, the resistance of farmers – which emerges from a contradiction between, on the one hand, the structure of the inspection and marketing schemes and, on the other, what they know to be true from their everyday experience – can be understood to be counter-hegemonic.

Chapter 2

Applying a Gramscian Lens: Eggs, Hegemony and Passive Revolution

Following the Saltspring Island egg wars, we can see that ideology plays a significant role in the function of organizations that regulate the work of farmers. I refer to this network of ruling organizations as the regulatory food regime. The term “regulatory food regime” is one that I have developed inline with Dorothy Smith’s (1999) notion of ruling relations. Ruling relations are the network of state and corporate agencies that organize ruling. They organize society in “abstraction from local settings, extra-locally” (Smith 1999:49). For Smith, it is by way of relations of ruling that individuals become objectified by institutional discourses.

Building on the idea of ruling relations, but shifting the focus to food and agriculture, I conceptualize a regulatory food regime to be a specified form of the “internally coordinated complex of administrative, managerial, professional, and discursive organization that regulate, organize, govern, and otherwise control our societies” (Smith 1999:49). This regime is a network of ruling institutions that includes agribusiness,¹⁴ governments and agencies that mediate the work of farmers in Canada. With respect to eggs, this extends, but is not limited to, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the BC Egg Producers, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Health Authorities and Provincial Ministries of Health and Agriculture and Lands.

¹⁴ Agribusiness is quite simply agriculture operated by and as a business. Agribusiness focuses on the production, processing and distribution of agricultural products and tends to produce cash crops through monoculture production. Agribusiness is by definition large-scale.

George Smith (2006:48) explains that “[i]deological practice operates as a set of procedures used to know theoretically, categorically, the social world with a view to administering it.” Ideology is understood here to be an organized system of beliefs, ideas and values. People internalize these dominant practices and procedures that regulate society to the extent that they become common sense. This approaches what Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci was getting at with his theorization on hegemony.

Hegemony is a very intricate and multifaceted process; a process that Canadian cultural historian Ian McKay (2005:61) likens to a dance; one in which the lead dancer manoeuvres the partner, gently coaxing the partner to glide, turn and dip in response to the leader. With practice, the partner’s actions, despite being controlled by the lead, begin to feel natural to the extent that they forget they are being led. By way of this process, the actions and language of the hegemonic group (the lead) are normalized and society (the partner) learns to follow to the extent to where followed actions are also normalized and feel natural and autonomous.

Hegemony is often used to refer to the dominance of one group over another without the threat of force. However, in the current era of late capitalism, hegemony is increasingly understood as “organizing consent to the ruling relations of capitalism” (Carroll 2006a:10). This type of dominance results in the entrenchment of particular social beliefs and values and exercises the partial exclusion and submersion of others. Indeed, current hegemonic practices have made market-driven politics and cultural fragmentation common sense (Carroll 2006a, McKay 2005) and have promoted the growth and dominance of neoliberalism¹⁵ in late-capitalist societies.

¹⁵ Neoliberalism is the economic-political philosophy that refers to the economic liberalism which has emerged hegemonic in international economic policy discussions and the national policies of late-capitalist

Fragmentation is indicative of the neoliberal logic of ruling regimes, and agriculture policy has by no means managed to escape it. John Wilcox, a farmer on Saltspring Island, who is well known in farming and land-use circles across BC, explains:

I have a list of 60 acts of legislation that come to bear on a farm operation; 60 acts of legislation. In my opinion, there should be one agency, like a commission, I mean you could turn the Land Commission into this, and then, consolidate all of the, or condense all of these laws into a protocol for farm operations and get away from having about 60 different agencies coming down on farmers. They are making farming almost next to impossible to do these days.

The cross-sectional distribution of responsibility and jurisdiction is symptomatic of the diffusion of power in late capitalist societies. This diffusion results in fragmentation which the obfuscation of power and makes resistance increasingly difficult. Consider the example that Dorothy Smith (2006:18-9) provides at the start of her undergraduate Research and Social Justice course of a peasant's revolt that took place in England in 1381. As Smith describes it, during this revolt several hundred men marched to London, killed some barons and bishops and earned a meeting with King Richard II. At the meeting, the King assured the peasants that their grievances would be attended to and encouraged them to return home. Those who did not return were murdered. Smith compares this organization of a movement against social injustice to current struggles. Today, farmers cannot march to their town council and demand change. They would have to march to their local health authority, then over to the BC Egg Marketing Board continuing from there to the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and

nations from the 1970s onwards. Neoliberalism promotes the rejection of government intervention in the domestic economy in favour of free-market methods, scant limitations on business operations, and individual property rights. Contemporary capitalism is maintained by neoliberal ideology (Balakrishnan *et al.* 2003:308).

Lands and to the Ministry of Health. From there they would have to march to the federal Department of Agriculture, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, and the list goes on and on.

The concern is that this fragmentation results in myriad organizations each with their own set of bureaucratic processes and requirements (i.e., paper work) and each mediating the work of farmers. These requirements leave many farmers stretched financially and temporally. As Fred Reid of Olera Farms, an organic farm in the Fraser Valley told me, “the only people that can afford to handle that level of bureaucracy and paper work are the big boys ...”

This institutional micro-management has a direct impact on the ability of sustainable farmers to continue farming. The reality is that many farmers quit because they cannot keep up with the demands placed upon them by the regulatory food regime. Their withdrawal from farming otherwise leaves fewer individuals producing food in a sustainable way. It also actively discourages new farmers who get turned-off or overwhelmed by the pressure to conform to regulations that were designed for industrial producers but are enforced at all levels.

Gramsci avoids viewing the state as the centre of power and highlights the complex calculus of modern power arrangements within a broader concept of civil society. Approaching the regulatory food regime as part of civil society makes it possible to address the complex relations between the state apparatus and the socio-cultural field in which it is embedded, without losing sight of the state’s monopoly on the means of coercion. Starting from this understanding, the regulatory food regime can be understood as a network whose institutions (i.e., the BCEMB, the Health Authorities or consumer

outlets) partake in governance through a diffuse arrangement of power. Said otherwise, the neoliberal project is not simply a state-led venture but rather it transcends the public/private domain and involves the media, industry, financial institutions, and education systems among others. More specifically, the regulatory food regime is not a singular entity or a tool of the state but rather a network of institutions and words, most of which are committed to the neoliberal project and, by virtue of their legitimacy (established through coercion and consent) the regime has the authority to mediate the work of sustainable farmers.

According to Gramsci, an historic bloc establishes and maintains its advantage in a hegemonic arrangement through techniques of ideological coercion (like creating new regulations that restrict the ability of people to continue their work) and through consent. Consent is established through the promotion of a universal (Hatt & Hatt 2007): an objective that is to be attained. I suggest there are two complementary universals promoted by the regulatory food regime as part of the neoliberal agenda.¹⁶ For consumers, the universal is one of “safe, affordable food” and for producers it is one of “market access”¹⁷ (see Barichello 1995: 40). And clearly, both parties – consumers and producers – have a vested interest in achieving such a condition. However, subscribing to these universals facilitates the regulatory food regime’s control over the means by which these goals are achieved. Thus, by way of this dance of coercion, people consent to this system.

¹⁶ These can be found in the vision and mission statements of the CFIA, CEMA and the BCEMB.

¹⁷ For example, on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website, it is written that (my emphasis):
 In order to maintain a *competitive marketplace* and provide consumers with a wide selection of affordable and high quality products, it is critical that the *regulatory regime be both fair and effective*. The CFIA is committed to maintaining an effective, transparent, *rules-and science-based domestic regulatory framework*.

Needless to say, the agriculture sector in Canada has not avoided the effects of hegemonic arrangements of neoliberalism. This organizing of consent around the ruling relations of capital has resulted – especially since the 1950s, but accelerating in recent decades – in a steady shift away from the family farm toward an agribusiness model.

Modern agriculture

as practiced since the Second World War is the result of applying industrial methods to traditional farming practices. The characteristics of industrial agriculture are high-input cropping dependent on fossil fuels, intensive animal husbandry, mechanization, and the reduction of human work. The efficiency of this farming is measured only in monetary terms – the return on investment – leaving the unwanted results of the process (pollution, habitat destruction, unemployment) to be described as “byproducts” (Wilson 1991:194-5).

Indeed, the concentration of agro-capital and the rise of agribusiness has transformed the character of agricultural policies. This corporate concentration¹⁸ (see figures 6 and 7) is indicative of the hegemonic arrangement that the current framework serves. For the last few decades, industrial farming has been championed by successive Canadian governments through policies that have actively sought to restructure agriculture in accordance with neoliberal logic. In 1977, the Agriculture Task Force released a four-volume report: *Orientation of Canadian Agriculture*. The report identified the national priorities for agriculture as:

1. Economic development;
2. Rising and stable incomes;
3. Full employment and;
4. Harmonious international and Federal-Provincial relations.

These priorities represented both the Keynesian ideals of full employment and stable incomes as well as neoliberal goals of market growth through economic development and

¹⁸ Figure 6 highlights the decreasing number of egg producers and the simultaneous increase in the average number of laying hens in BC flocks.

increased global trade. As we moved into the last decade of the twentieth century, the push for neoliberal policies was winning out. Agriculture Canada produced several documents (i.e., *Growing Together* (1989) and *Vision on Future Directions for Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food* (1994)) arguing for the agriculture sector to become increasingly self-reliant and market-oriented, becoming less dependent on financial support offered by the government and more internationally competitive. More recently, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's 2006 *Report on Plans and Priorities* opens with the statement "Helping agriculture grow, prosper and be competitive on the world stage is key to the Canadian economy." Indeed, the government promises to

help position the sector to benefit from increased market opportunities. At the World Trade Organization (WTO) agriculture negotiations, Canada has been seeking to improve market access for our exporters, and is also pursuing such efforts through regional and bilateral trade initiatives.

The report is clearly written with large-scale, exporting farms in mind. Its priorities (such as industrial agriculture model and global trade) are complementary to the hegemonic neoliberal project. This is also rather troubling when one takes into consideration the looming threat of global peak oil and increasing concern over the environmental cost of food transportation, or what many are calling 'food miles.'

One thing that has become apparent to me through this research is that Canadian agriculture is fraught with contradictions. One could argue that the current supply management structure that regulates the production and sale of eggs in many ways contradicts the core tenets of neoliberalism: most notably, *laissez-faire* policies with respect to the economic market. This makes analyzing policies that undermine sustainable farming particularly difficult. The supply-management system in Canada is

designed to ensure orderly production and orderly marketing in an industry (agriculture) notorious for its wild fluctuations in price and supply. Marketing boards are seen as a way of protecting Canadian farmers from the kinds of roller coaster experiences that many farmers in non supply-managed commodity groups experience in both Canada and the US. The system protects Canadian farmers from the ensuing destabilization that could result from the dumping of these commodities in the Canadian market by successfully limiting imports on several commodities to ensure stable domestic markets. Another blatant contradiction to neoliberal tenets are farm subsidies. And, while the National Farmers Union highlights that Canadian farmers receive far fewer subsidies than those in the United States and the European Union, others argue that Canadian farmers are too heavily subsidised. Karl Beitel (2005:1), policy analyst at Food First and the Institute for Food and Development Policy, explains:

the main beneficiaries of subsidy payments are not farmers, but large agribusiness firms, whose access to a steady supply of cheap farm commodities reduces their costs and boosts their profits (as they don't pass through full cost savings to consumers). This line of reasoning leads to the assumption that reducing subsidies would curb overproduction and boost prices.

The farmers in question here are primarily large-scale farmers,¹⁹ not the small farmers I am concerned with in this thesis.

¹⁹ Direct payments to agriculture producers in Canada rose 1.7 per cent between 2004 and 2005 to \$4.9 billion. Direct program payments represent the amounts paid under various government agricultural programs. According to Statistic Canada (2006):

Farmers received large payments through the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization [CAIS] program and the Farm Income Payment program. The CAIS program delivered \$1.7 billion in 2005, more than double the amount in 2004. The CAIS program, which was introduced in 2004, was designed to help producers protect their farming operations from drops in income. The Farm Income Payment program delivered \$886 million. This program was designed to provide immediate federal assistance to Canadian producers, as the first step in an aggressive effort to restructure the national agriculture and agri-food industry.

Barriers to trade and subsidies are ideologically antithetical to the neoliberal logic. Yet, the regulatory food regime takes up the rhetoric of market equity and market growth, grounded in neo-liberal market ideology, to justify the imposition of industrial regulatory standards on sustainable farming. This contradiction requires further examination.

The Broader Context: Global Issues Framing Local Struggles

With respect to agricultural policy, the Canadian state is aggressively promoting market fundamentalism, global corporate rule and free trade. For example, in January 2007, Canada, joined by the European Union, Australia, Argentina and Brazil, requested consultations through the World Trade Organization over the United States' corn subsidies. At the same time, the Canadian government supports (albeit unevenly and in a complex way) domestic policies, such as marketing schemes, that contradict the rules of competition in favour of domestic interests. Indeed, despite the common pronouncement of a societal shift in the early 1970s away from Keynesian²⁰ policies towards neoliberalism, as Harry Shutt points out, Keynesianism was never left behind, at least not for large companies. Shutt (1998) elucidates that only certain parts of the welfare state were replaced: those that require public spending. Governments however have continued to spend money that benefits private capital and large corporations. Tax revenue, he (1998:2) argues, is being directed less into social services and instead being used to subsidize private enterprise "through tax breaks, grants, loan guarantees and other

²⁰ Keynesianism is an economic theory modeled on the ideas of twentieth century British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes highlighted the importance of cumulative demand for goods as the leading feature of the economy, most notably in times of slowed economic growth. He argued that government policies could be used to promote demand at a macro level so as to alleviate high unemployment and deflation. Keynes challenged the logic of supply and demand economics which posit an inherent economic equilibrium.

devices.” In agreement with Shutt, Balakrishnan *et al.* (2003:308) argue that simultaneously the “ideological rationalization to support such measures is provided by ‘free marketology,’ even though a free market required minimal state involvement in the economy.” This “free marketology,” as Balakrishnan *et al.* (2003:308) call it, is thus applied as a tool “for requiring austerity from the masses as the welfare state is dismantled because the state can no longer afford it.” The point I am trying to stress here is that hegemonic arrangements shift and in doing so they make accommodations to former hegemonic arrangements.

An exploration into the regulatory food regime through a Gramscian optic helps to clarify the influence of the neoliberal agenda. It allows us to re-evaluate the power of the “market,” which tends to be understood as having an internal logic of its own that governs its practices along with those of its interlocutors. However, following from our understanding of hegemony, we in turn understand that neoliberal policies were set in place and forwarded to serve the interests of ruling and emergent elite networks. Indeed, as we have seen in the exploration of the egg marketing scheme, the entire system is predicated on maintaining rule through the perpetuation of an ambiguity: the force that sustains the neoliberal agenda, at least in agriculture, is contrary to the presumed logic of the agenda. What I mean to say here is that at first glance, supply management and farmer subsidies appear contrary to the pursuits of neoliberalism. However, in their application these programs I have just highlighted conform to the neoliberal project. In the case of the egg marketing board in BC, the system has managed to secure markets for a very small elite group of producers who now act as judge, jury and executioner over the policies that regulate their operations. These operations are run, not with ecological

and food security goals in mind, and are very clearly tied to the industrial mode of production and profit making. They also make it very hard for new farmers and those who farm otherwise to enter the market.

Elite interests are intimately tied to industrial agriculture, or more appropriately, to a larger industrial network (McLaughlin 2006; Murphy 2002; McNeely & Scherr 2002; O'Driscoll 2005; Mattera 2004). In many cases, agriculture is subsidised and protected to maintain the influence of the regulatory food regime (O'Driscoll 2005; Mattera 2004), and regulatory regimes can act as political conduits for established or aspiring economic interests (McMahon 2005). Approaches that contradict the dominant logic are co-opted or delegitimised to ensure the stability of the greater system. This explains why farming practices – like those employed by people who “farm otherwise”²¹ – that promote alternatives that materially or culturally threaten the established industrial egg production system are ideologically positioned as unhealthy and unsafe in dominant discourse. This was made very clear in the case of the Saltspring Island egg wars.

As William Carroll (2006a:10) notes, today the question of hegemony “looms larger than perhaps at any time since the 1930s, yet the challenges of constructing a political alternative to the rule of capital seem more daunting than ever.” However he also notes that there are increasing possibilities for and examples of alternative ways of life. One such way of life is sustainable farming. Sustainable farmers take up the work of “farming otherwise.” They choose to farm in a way that is contrary to the dominant industrial model.

²¹ This is adapted from historian Ian McKay's (2005) concept of “living otherwise,” elucidated in McKay, *Reds, Rebels, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History*.

Jonathan Joseph's (2002) realist approach conceives of hegemony as having an objective basis in material conditions. For Joseph (2002:162) hegemony is a continual process of "both material cause and reproduced outcome." From this perspective, hegemony is "concerned with the process by which social structures are reproduced and transformed, and it is precisely this location in the process of social reproduction/transformation which places constraints but also allows for the possibility of different agents to construct and elaborate their own hegemonic blocs, projects and alliances" (Joseph 2002:10). This possibility of constructing new hegemonic blocs can be referred to as counter-hegemony. Counter-hegemony is as multifarious a concept as hegemony, however, it can be simply defined as a direct or indirect challenge to the cultural, political, social, intellectual and economic leadership exercised by the dominant class. The possibility for transformation exists within hegemonic social structures when the ideologies of ruling relations come apart. That is, when "people know a situation to be otherwise on the basis of their everyday experiences" (G. Smith 2006: 48). This is what happened on Saltspring Island when the enforcement of a by-law, informed by the ideologies of the regulatory food regime, was actively resisted by people who know, by way of their own lived experience, that local eggs produced on sustainable farms are safer and healthier than those produced in the industrial system.

Passive Revolution

Hegemony is a multifarious arrangement that is never static. Indeed it is in constant flux as it adapts and responds to societal shifts. Gramsci draws our attention to these shifts by exposing the power of capitalist societies to reintegrate critique. For Gramsci, under the system of modern capitalism, the ruling network maintains control by

allowing certain instances of resistance to be addressed by the political arena.²² In such instances, the ruling network engages in a passive revolution by allowing hegemonic positions to shift in ways that are not necessarily in their immediate interest. These small concessions are undertaken in the interest of those who hold power. As Ian McKay explains (2000:628), “a given social group can only exercise leadership over others by going beyond its immediate corporate interests to take into account the interests of other groups and classes.”

Passive revolution generally refers to elite-engineered social and political reform (Gramsci 1971:59) but Gramsci applies the concept of passive revolution in two ways. To elaborate on the general definition I just provided, passive revolution can be a technique or program adopted by the ruling elite when its hegemony is threatened or weakened in any way. In this context, a passive revolution is undertaken when an historic bloc has authority but lacks hegemony and needs to restrict progressive forces (Adamson 1980:186). As Walter Adamson (1980:186) notes, this “could be accomplished by launching a minimally progressive political campaign designed to undercut the truly progressive classes.”

In the case of the Saltspring Island egg wars and in the steps that marketing boards and governments are making towards creating their own set of “organic” standards, we can see a passive revolution taking place. As the demand for organic, local and natural food increases, the dominant food system is threatened. Indeed, as our “common sense” understandings of safe food shift, the ruling elite are undertaking

²² Gramsci talks about hegemony in terms of class domination. I have opted to refer to the ruling elite as a ruling network. I believe that it more adequately describes the type of power that is exercised by the regulatory food regime in the age of fragmentation. It also complements my notion of regulatory food regimes as a the combination of corporate, professional and bureaucratic agencies in a web through which ruling comes to be organized.

minimally progressive steps to undercut progressive currents, taking cues from alternative discourses and invoking terms like grain fed, free range, free-run and natural to obfuscate consumer choice. For large industrial farms the goal is the ability to sell a new marketable product. There is little concern for the ideologies and practices that informed the original movement, but the outcomes appear the same: a healthy, ethical food choice. Here we see how by incorporating elements of sustainable farming discourses, the regulatory food regime undermines the potency of the critique. Also, while these large businesses take up the discourse of sustainable food, they continue to actively restrict the ability of sustainable producers to farm and sell their product, be it by maintaining monopoly control over the marketing structures, by creating alternative certification processes or by actively lobbying for policies that restrict smaller-scale, sustainable farming.

The concept of passive revolution helps elucidate how the regulatory food regime responds to shifts in popular understandings of food and how this regime has in many ways incorporated these interests back into the dominant discourse, effectively limiting resistance. I expand on this analysis later in my examination of the BCEMB's Standing Orders, paying particular attention to the area of Specialty Quota. I explore how this new type of quota provides the BC Egg Marketing Board a "legitimate" way to develop their own definitions of organics and free-range eggs, effectively usurping power and attention away from the definitions and discourses that sustainable farmers have worked so hard to establish. I also explore how through a passive revolution, the goals of sustainable farming (healthy, just food systems), have been replaced by the means (organic and/or

natural production), effectively undermining and obfuscating consumer choice, to the benefit of the regulatory food regime.

As I explained above, there is also another facet of passive revolution. As Adamson (1980) explains, the social climate that prompts passive revolution is not without opportunities for progressive classes. Indeed, Gramsci (1971:114) notes that passive revolution also presents ‘criterion of interpretation’ for non-elite movements (see also Sassoon 1982:133). The incorporation of once alternative discourses (like organic) into the mainstream has provided a platform for alternative movements.

McKay (1994:305) writes that a “neo-Gramscian approach which was learned from but has conceptual independence from critical theory can, in resisting the temptations of economistic and culturalist reductionisms, help us to understand both the power and fragility of ideologies in a fragmented and fragmenting post-modern world.” Indeed, while Gramsci’s thinking on hegemony, counter-hegemony, passive revolution and cultural fragmentation are helpful, they are not adequate on their own. Stuart Hall (1988:162) insists “Gramsci gives us, not the tools with which to solve the puzzle, but the means with which to ask the right kinds of questions.” In what follows I build on the understanding of the regulatory food regime that I have just outlined by examining the relationship between knowledge, truth and power in the context of the hegemonic neoliberal project. Taking guidance from French social theorist Michel Foucault, I explore how the regulatory food regime engages scientific discourse to maintain power.

Chapter 3

The Politics of Food is a Politics of Discourse

Marianne Lien (2004:10) explains that “the politics of food is also a ‘politics of discourse’ in which the power to set the public agenda, to frame the debate, and to silence opponents, becomes a key resource.” She continues, such “politics of discourse may be analysed as the strategic use of food metaphors, the distribution of blame and shame and the role of the media in framing abstract risks in such a way that they are perceived as ‘real’ or relevant to ordinary consumers.” I am interested in analysing the strategic application of the discourse of science, which as we saw from the egg wars, is enacted by the regulatory food regime to legitimate actions. The interesting part is that the discourse of science is used to rationalise policy in many ways contradicts the experiential knowledge of the people who actually produce the food. It appears that science discourse is being used to maintain the power of the regulatory food regime.

Michel Foucault suggests that power systems are preserved through the work of institutions specializing in the production of truth and knowledge. Here, power is mediated through discourse and dialogue, being constituted, in part through the knowledge that one possesses. Knowledge assumes not only the authority of “the truth” but it has the power to make itself true; or rather, it becomes a discursive formation sustaining a regime of truth (Hall 1997). Knowledge, contrary to common sense understandings, is not synonymous with truth. Instead, something need only be stated as true in order for the statement to have an impact in the discourse. The authority to produce knowledge allows for the continuation of the exercise of power.

I have already discussed, drawing from Gramsci, how neoliberal ideology supports elite discourse and helps maintain power. Taking this a step further now, we can see how one of the ways that elite rule is legitimated is via the discourse of science.²³ The discourse of science is invoked to give legitimacy to knowledge that supports regulatory food regime and the broader neoliberal project. In late-capitalist societies, the discourse of science has become institutionalised as power (Foucault 1972 see also Barrett 1991).

The discourse of science in many instances works to legitimate neoliberal ideology thereby supporting the continuation of power. As Jean Francois Lyotard (2002:3) declares, “[s]cientific knowledge is discourse.” However, he (2002:7) acknowledges that “scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge” as it has always “existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge:” narrative knowledge. Science, contends Lyotard (2002:xxiii):

has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status. . .

Today, science, to the extent that it is dependent on capital investment, is intimately allied with the process of industrialization (Balakrishnan *et al.* 2003:302). Vandana Shiva is a physicist, ecofeminist, environmental activist and author whose life experience informs her understanding of science, effectively grounding and forwarding similar ideas

²³ The notion of “discourse” has not escaped heated debate. In the social sciences, it is generally understood to be an institutionalized way of thinking. Discourse is a system of representation; it is what constructs the topic. However, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985:108) suggest, “[t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism debate.” The concept of discourse encompasses everything from written, spoken and signed language as well as visual representations such as pictures and gestures.

as those posited by Foucault and Lyotard. Shiva was born in the valley of Dehradun, India where her father worked with forest conservation and her mother farmed. In India, she has established Navdanya, a movement for biodiversity conservation and farmers' rights. From her particular perspective (1988:232):

modern science is quintessentially reductionist. Its reductionist nature undergirds an economic structure based on exploitation, profit universalization and capital accumulation. Reductionist science is also at the root of the growing ecological crisis, because it entails a transformation of nature such that the processes, regularities and regenerative capacity of nature are destroyed.”

As I explore in greater detail later, in Canada, science-based egg regulations, or regulations rationalised as having a scientific-basis, have developed alongside trade considerations and exist to provide the most efficient way to ensure a particular kind of food safety, with little consideration or concern for the environment. Furthermore, and rather ironically, the industrial production legitimized by science-based food safety regulations have been linked to significant food outbreaks in recent years (for example, Mad Cow, Avian Flu, Foot and Mouth). And yet, definitions of food safety are not homogenous and the food safety model forwarded by the regulatory food regime often contradicts what farmers know on the basis of their experience. What the regulatory food regime deems safe on the basis of their science, sustainable farmers deem as very unsafe on the basis of their experience. Many of the references to science made by farmers is to science as a social object in which farmers live, rather than the practice of science by scientists (which of course varies). That is, they are concerned with how government regulators, health officials and others invoke or refer science in their interactions with farmers and how science as a social object enters policy discussions. According the

farmers I spoke with, science-talk is used to invoke authority, not empirically-based reality. Ironically, many farmers see themselves as empirically based and the invocation of science-talk as ideologically or politically motivated.

The egg wars on Saltspring are an example of scientific discourse being engaged to de-legitimize the experiential knowledge of those standing in the shadows of the regulatory food regime. Inspectors upheld decisions informed by a discourse that promotes scientific and industrial processes of production, inspection and marketing over knowledge gained through lived experience. The prohibition on the sale of ungraded eggs was rationalized by the absence of science-based inspections. We see in examining the egg wars how the discourse of science is used to rationalise industrial production that supports the neoliberal order, at the risk of, according to the farmers I spoke to, environmental health, animal welfare and human health.

Spokespersons for the regulatory food regime maintain that grading is a scientific process required to ensure food safety. If we look at the “about us” section of the CFIA’s website, on a page titled “Science and regulation... working together for Canadians,” the CFIA emphasizes that science informs its interventions:

Our Vision

To excel as a science-based regulator, trusted and respected by Canadians and the international community.

Foucault (2003:10) encourages us to ask questions about the “aspiration to power that is inherent in the claim to being a science.” The questions he wants us to ask are:

- “What types of knowledge are you trying to disqualify when you say that you are a science?”

- “What speaking subject, what discursive subject, what subject of experience and knowledge are you trying to minorize when you begin to say: ‘I speak this discourse, I am speaking a scientific discourse and I am a scientist’?”

To be clear, my aim here is not to make a “bogey man” of science. What I am concerned with is how the discourse of science is used to de-legitimize experiential knowledge for the advancement of neoliberal pursuits. The issue is not whether science is good or bad, or whether we are to believe what scientists tell us. The point I am making is that when scientific discourse is used to rationalize a policy position it is important that we ask the types of questions that Foucault forwards. Moreover, it is important that we ask these questions regardless of whether or not we agree with the science that is being forwarded. Ask someone who has been raising chickens in a sustainable way for forty years what she thinks about grading regulations and she will likely tell you that they are in many ways less safe than traditional on-farm inspection procedures. For example, without exception, every sustainable farmer that I spoke with highlighted how washing eggs in bleach removes a protective layer that coats the shell and preserves the eggs. My point is that we need to start paying attention to the experiential knowledge and (everyday) science being undertaken by experts in the field, in this case, farmers.

As I argued earlier, regulatory food regimes maintain hegemony by promoting a particular worldview; one in which industrial agriculture is forwarded as the most effective system for producing affordable, reliable and safe food, maintained by scientific principles.²⁴ As well, the market is promoted as providing the best way (and in practice, the only way) to ensure healthy affordable food. Science has been socially constructed as a rational “teller of truth.” As a result, the universally available object of consumption,

²⁴ Jules Pretty (2002), an English agronomist recently studied two hundred sustainable agriculture projects in fifty two countries. He found that sustainable agriculture led to an average ninety-three percent increase in per hectare food production.

safe and affordable food, is ideologically and materially produced and maintained through a reliance on scientific discourse.

Foucault explains that he developed his method “to fight the power-effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific” (Foucault, 1997:9). Genealogy is indeed posited by Foucault as an “anti-science” (1997:10). I find this aspect of Foucault’s work particularly useful in the context of my research as many of the farmers that I have spoken to actively work in resistance to powerful scientific discourses that are used to legitimate the regulatory food regime. As we saw in the case of the egg wars, farmers’ knowledge of the safety of their product is in many ways contradicted by scientific-based laws apparently enforced to keep food safe. Farmers, especially those farming outside of the conventional system, have been actively excluded from participating in the creation of the regulations that currently mediate food safety, food inspection, food production and food processing. Sustainable farmers have intimate knowledge of the land they farm, and of their animals and crops, which is different from the knowledge of their neighbours and of the policy makers in Ottawa and Victoria. To get at this local knowledge we must start in the everyday world and with the knowledge of people who do the work of sustainable farming. Foucault suggests that subjugated knowledge can also be found through an excavation of discourse.

Foucault presents but one of a number of methods for uncovering discourses that influence and mediate our society by providing a framework for uncovering the biases inherent in science. For Ian McKay (1994:300) “Foucault usefully alerts us to the strangeness of seemingly self-evident categories.” This is essential to critical research on agricultural and food. Challenging our objects of analysis is an important move with

respect to food politics. Too many approaches to 'food politics have tended to focus on singular (seemingly self-evident) categories of food (i.e., [processing], [health], [safety], [production], [inspection], [trade], [consumption]) (Lien 2004). But nothing in agriculture happens in a vacuum. Agriculture has always stretched over boundaries of ecology, culture, politics, trade and labour (to name a few). By honing in on one aspect of the system, we must be careful not to exclude important interlocutors. Elizabeth Henderson (2000:176) remarks that:

in focussing on a single issue, many organizations have not always grasped the systemic nature of the problems they face or the need for an integrated analysis and multifaceted response. Worse yet, groups have been pitted against one another because they fail to see their shared interests.

Food activists, researchers and policy makers must not think of their 'issue' as an autonomous variable. Rather, we must approach our work with the understanding that aspects of the food systems are integrated with myriad other systems. By expanding our analysis and approach from food related issues to food politics, we are better positioned to take into consideration the interconnectedness of traditionally independent categories. To avoid this trap, I attend closely to the knowledge of those who farm otherwise, whose lives are organized, as Dorothy Smith would argue, by both local circumstances but also by extra-local relations of ruling whose tracks are everywhere but whose workings are neither easily identified nor recognized for what they are.

The regulatory food regime frames the Saltspring Island egg wars within a discourse of food safety. I have already explained in theoretical terms how scientific discourse is used to legitimise the actions of ruling networks, but it important to review how this process plays out on the ground. By examining this discursive strategy from the

standpoint of sustainable farmers we gain insight into the structuring of power and the workings of knowledge. As I outline above, food safety is a political and social issue and responsibility for it transcends many policy sectors. While the stated basic objective of food safety policy is the promotion and protection of public health, as we can see from the egg wars on Saltspring Island that a number of non-health objectives can be identified, such as market and trade considerations as well as competition.

As our “food system appears to lurch from crisis to crisis,” people are becoming increasingly wary of industrial food production (Lang and Heasman 2004:3). Regulatory food regimes have sought to legitimize themselves, their actions and their definitions of food through the strategic crafting and application of discourse. Indicative of a passive revolution, corporations are managing hegemonic understandings of safe food by engaging in campaigns to develop positive-associations with concepts like “equitable,” “organic,” “sustainable” and “local” and to link these concepts to their brands. The conventional food industry has managed to effectively undermine social movements, such as the fair-trade and organics movements, by incorporating the language of these social movements into their own corporate speak.

In the last two chapters I have framed the struggle of sustainable egg farmers in the context of a hegemonic neoliberal project that is upheld by scientific discourse. I have argued that although many see the neoliberal economic project as characterized by deregulation and privatization, the increased regulation of sustainable farmers is still consistent with that broader politico-economic project. I have offered an understanding of the political and social situation faced by sustainable egg producers, and others who stand in the shadow of the regulatory food regime, in the context of power. I have

highlighted the discourse of science as one which works to produce knowledge that forwards elite power. I have explored how this relationship of power plays out on the ground with respect to egg regulations in BC and how it actively disregards the experiences and knowledge of those in the shadow of the regulatory food regime. In the next chapters I take this understanding of the social as I try, from the standpoint of sustainable egg producers, to make sense of the egg wars and more broadly, the egg system in Canada.

Chapter 4

Building the Foundations for Inquiry: Institutional Ethnography

Following Dorothy Smith (1987), my project is framed by a problematic materialized from a site of inquiry. Smith forwards a materialist feminist approach that she has called institutional ethnography (IE). In IE, a site of inquiry emerges from a disjuncture in the normal ordering of the everyday world and a problematic can be discerned in the tricky situations that people find themselves in as a result. As I have already outlined, my observed ‘disjuncture’ – the reason I chose this topic for my thesis – was the revelation that the Health Authorities considered the fresh, local eggs produced from free-range hens on the farm down the road from me on Saltspring Island less ‘safe’ than eggs produced in the industrial battery cage system. These eggs are considered so unsafe that the Health Authorities want to stop me from buying them at my local market. Clearly, the ideologies informing the systems that mediate the sale of eggs and control the definitions of ‘safe’ eggs are contrary to what I understand to be safe. All of a sudden, the texts I had been reading in school began to make sense. Surely this is what George Smith (2006: 48) was talking about when he explained that “[i]deological practice operates as a set of procedures used to know theoretically, categorically, the social world with a view to administering it.” Rather than seeing the health inspector and other institutional actors as a bunch of bureaucratic fascists, as several farmers suggested to me in private, I could make sociological sense of what appeared as a local insanity. I could see that people assimilate ideological procedures “as a form of social consciousness that develops as an everyday feature of their social lived” (G. Smith 2006:48): this is hegemony. However, hegemony “is ruptured when people know a situation to be

otherwise on the basis of their everyday experience” (G. Smith 2006:48). Applied to my research, we can see that the social organization encouraging local health inspector to restrict the sale of ungraded eggs at the Saltspring Island Farmers’ Market was constructed by the ideological practices of the regulatory food regime, which were conceptually coordinated at the local level by the idea that ungraded eggs are unsafe. These ideological practices, as we know, are created to forward and legitimize the regulatory food regime. The rupture in this case was the rejection of the cease-selling edict by farmers and consumers who intuitively knew from their everyday experience that eggs produced in the industrial system supported by the regulatory food regime are not safer or healthier than the eggs produced locally on sustainable farms. However, to see and understand this social disjuncture, it is necessary to take the standpoint of sustainable farmers and position myself with these farmers on their side of the “line of fault separating them from the objective bureaucratic domain” (Smith, G. 1990:631) of the regulatory food regime.

Therefore, following Dorothy Smith, I take up the standpoint of the farmers and their stories form the basis of this research. Smith (1999) is clear that standpoint means beginning in the actualities of peoples lives and using these experiences as the starting point to orient the social as it organises people. I thought this was self-evident but in practice this proved to be very difficult. By reading and re-reading Smith’s work, I have come to realise that standpoint must analytically describe the experiences of those being ruled in such a way that allows for the explication of the ruling relations from their lived experience and embodied consciousness. Under the current marketing system, sustainable egg producers are faced with the options of selling their eggs illegally, selling small

quantities at the farm gate, not selling their eggs at all, or selling their eggs into the marketing system. The latter in many cases contradicts their farming ethic. As well, these farmers rarely have (and can rarely afford) quota and they are offered a lower price for their eggs than they can get at the farmers' market. These are the people whose stories and experiences ground my research. I do not mean to say that farmers have either a shared 'standpoint,' or a privileged perspective with respect to truth. However, as Dorothy Smith argues, the effects of relations of power are often more clearly (albeit still only partially) visible to those on the margins of power.

Indeed, the purpose is to create knowledge of the social that is grounded in peoples' experiences of their own lives. In taking the standpoint of those who farm otherwise I am able to develop "empirically grounded sociological insight that escapes the logic and priorities of entrenched power that shows how those priorities are instantiated and inscribed in texts and extra-local relations, including capital relations" (Carroll 2006b:238). Smith (1999:96) writes that her "sociology for people" explores from experience and beyond it, "beginning in the living as people can speak of it, rather than in the pre-givens of theoretically designed discourse." Indeed, it was through interviews that I began to better understand the everyday world in which farmers are embedded. At this point, I was able to map the regulatory food regime and begin to understand and "make visible" how the social relations are put "together and organized in and by a larger complex of ruling relations" (Smith, D. 1993:84).

In this thesis, sustainable egg farmers are understood to be people who, in many ways, stand outside the ruling regimes that seek to manage society. The farmers I have spoken to on Saltspring Island consciously uphold a 'sustainable ethic' which is

challenged by and challenges the ideologies that make up the egg marketing system. The majority these farmers started farming, or returned to it, later in life; leaving successful professional careers. They deliberately chose farming as part of an alternative lifestyle.

Kim Elsser of Indigo Farms explained:

Yeah, our first summer was the year 2000 and neither of us are farmers. So my background is microbiology and my husband is an engineer, but this property came up and it had already been farmed for maybe about eight years or so. So all of it was fenced and most of the fields were already in place. And we came and we planted and away we went. And we just have been learning as we go. So the first thing we did, the first season, is that we went and got ourselves some chickens. We started with a flock of twenty I think, of twenty-five, because we realised that we were going to need their manure in order to enrich our farm. The farmers before us had not done anything with the soil, so it was fairly depleted. So we put in this chicken run.



Figure 4: Chickens at Indigo Farms

Later she told me:

And then we came out here. We were looking for somewhere to go in the Province 'cause it was getting too busy in Vancouver on the west side. I think this is just the neatest lifestyle. . . Yes, 'cause you get to pick your own hours, you can do something useful, 'cause you contribute to society.

Harry Warner told me:

Well, I used to grow vegetables and keep chickens in Ireland as a youngster. I lived in a farming community. And then when I decided to come to Saltspring Island, at almost a moment's notice, I decided to become an organic farmer, and that was 16 years ago. And so that was it.

I asked him why he made that decision:

Oh because, we're killing our children with non-organic foods, there's no question about it. And it's my little contribution to the world. I used to be a university professor ... business computing and mathematics. I'm a mathematician, with my background. So I grew up on the west coast of Ireland, where back then there was no such thing as organic farming cause there was no such thing as pesticides or herbicides or, even artificial fertilizer at that stage. So everything is just natural. And um, that's how I got into it.

However, Sally Dailly of North End Farms provides a slightly different perspective. She explained to me that in her experience:

People seem to think that they're better because they farm. Well, I don't think so. Everybody does a job, there is the person who goes and works at McDonalds which gets boring after a little while, but who does their job and doesn't complain that they're better than, you know what I mean? . . . I get very frustrated 'cause they think they're holier than thou. Everybody just does. Well we're very lucky. You know we would never be able to do this if we hadn't already owned the property. It's made it so my parents passed it down to the next generation and all of us kids. You know, it wasn't a smart career move, but there's five of us kids sitting on this property together and its fun and it's an opportunity that way. It's a different life. It is a nice community to live in.

Regardless of their different understandings of the work that they do, Harry, Kim and Sally all engage in 'farming otherwise,' that is, farming outside of and in opposition to the dominant industrial system. Grounding my research in their varied daily experiences provides "a ground work for grass roots political action; not only because, as a matter of method, it begins from the standpoint of those outside [or more appropriately in this case, on the fault line with] ruling regimes, but, because its analysis is directed at empirically

determining how such *regimes* work – that is, – how they are socially organized” (Smith, G, 2006:48, italics original).

Chapter 5

Mediating Egg Production within the Regulatory Food Regime

Earlier in the thesis, at the end of my discussion of the egg wars, I quoted John Wilcox who explained that while a compromise between farmers and the Health Authority was reached in the aftermath of the egg wars, the re-evaluation of a local health authority bylaw is by no means the end of the story. When it comes to egg production, how eggs are produced and in what quantities and how they are sold and consumed is mediated by several institutions and not just the Health Authorities. In this chapter, rather than starting from the top down, by way of a political or economic-type of analysis, I review the egg marketing system and then map this institutional matrix from the standpoint of sustainable egg farmers. As I argued earlier, “progressive” analysts often see supply management as a good thing for farmers. Criticisms of supply management more often come from those on the right who see them as barriers to trade and anti-competitive. The situation on the ground, however, is more complicated.

One of the first things that many sustainable egg farmers talked about when we began our conversations was the marketing board system. It became clear to me through these conversations that the marketing board is one of the institutions that is most active in mediating the work of egg farmers. During my conversation with Sally Dailly of North End Farms, she articulated:

- S: Oh, I imagine our days are numbered, when we aren't allowed to have any chickens.
J: Because of Avian Flu and all that?

S: Well that and marketing boards. I worked for agriculture in, a little while over there and they're very strong.

Fred Reid, an organic chicken farmer in the Fraser Valley, provides further insight into the imposing structure of the marketing system in Canada when he tells me that:

[W]ith the best of intentions, the government has tried to secure a safe way of guaranteeing a limited amount of production so that the markets are all there. So what they have done in the process is excluded about ninety-five percent of the farmers in the province from actually being viable in any way with poultry production at all, whether it is turkey or chickens, for meat or for eggs. And because it has become so exclusive, the options to diversify any farm operation into a sustainable farm with livestock and crops is limited and the guys who end up doing poultry don't want to do anything else, they can't, they're so big.

The Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) is the principal institution ordering and organizing the work of egg farmers, big and small. CEMA directs power from the core, but farmers generally interact with and experience the impacts of marketing boards through their interactions with regional bodies (for example by way regional quota allocation, regional exemption levels). However, CEMA and the marketing boards are just one component of the extremely complex organizational structure of the egg industry which challenges federal-provincial jurisdiction and enters into the portfolios of several federal departments and provincial ministries (see appendix C).

Michele Veeman (1987:992) broadly defines marketing boards as "legislatively specified compulsory marketing institutions which perform any of the functions of marketing on behalf of the producers or particular agricultural commodities."

Historically, at the federal level, agricultural marketing policies have reflected changes in social and political attitudes concerning government intervention. For the greater part of

the twentieth century governments policies reflected Keynesian ideals and policies towards agriculture were drafted less by the lobbying efforts of farmers and more by the goals of national policy (Veeman 1987:922). However, Michele Veeman (1987) argues that societal expectations of the role of governments began to shift to accept government “relief activities in the depression of the 1930s, the subordination of domestic economic activities in the 1940s, and increasing concern with social policy and use of income transfer mechanisms from the 1960s to the 1970.” Veeman (1997:1554) also highlights the influence of “[i]nternational commitments to the modification and restraint of national levels of support and protection for agriculture in . . . multilateral trade negotiations” as we moved into the late 1980s and early 1990. Today, while debates over supply management are actively taking place within the province and across the country,²⁵ the entire supply management system is being threatened by World Trade Organization negotiations and pressure from the United States and Australia to disband supply management schemes as barriers to free trade.

The development of egg policy provides useful context for understanding the current marketing system in Canada and policy developments do reflect the changes in social and political attitudes noted above. Indeed, components of the regulatory food regime which sustainable farmers now find so oppressive had their origins in nation building initiatives of earlier times. The move from farm-regulated and monitored egg production to a government-regulated system came in response to the *US Tariff Act* (1890) that significantly restricted imports into the U.S. The impacts of this act prompted

²⁵ This year the federal government forwarded plans to reconfigure the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) as a voluntary marketing entity that would operate as an open market. This would result in the dismantling of the he single desk function of the CWB.

Canadian egg and poultry producers to develop grades and undertake cooperative marketing to supply alternative export markets. Across Canada, equipment and informative brochures concerning candling techniques were distributed by the Dominion Department of Agriculture and egg inspectors were appointed to “educate producer in candling and promote cooperate marketing” (AACF 1999:2). In 1915, Canada became the first country to establish a government supervised poultry improvement plan.

Following World War One, there was an initial price boom that was followed by a drop in prices for agricultural goods across the globe (Veeman 1987:993). Farmers had long been suspicious of the equity of the established marketing system and some farmers’ groups managed to establish producer-controlled marketing institutions. Michele Veeman (1987:993) argues that the “failure of many of these cooperatives to satisfy their advocates’ high expectations later led to proposals for boards as ‘compulsory cooperatives.’”

While farmers were creating co-ops in attempts to remain economically viable, in Ottawa the government was busy passing the *Livestock and Livestock Products Act* (1918). With respect to eggs, this act established further regulations for grading and marketing. The regulations applied to eggs that were exported or moved inter-provincially. In 1923, these regulations were amended to include processed eggs and eggs intended for domestic sale.

At the same time, provincial governments were passing legislation enabling the establishment of boards that would regulate the marketing of agricultural products within their provincial boundaries (Veeman 1987:993). In the late 1930s and 1940 the Canadian Federation of Agriculture urged the Federal Government to pass legislation that would

support the provincial marketing boards that had been established in every province, with the exception of Québec. However, with the onset of World War Two and “the invocation of the *War Measures Act*, the federal government assumed extensive powers over the marketing of agricultural products; and it was not until 1949 that the Federal *Agricultural Products Marketing Act* was passed” (Veeman, 1987:993). This act meant that boards established under provincial legislation were delegated the same type of powers “with respect to provincial products sold in interprovincial and export trade as they exercised for products sold in intraprovincial trade” (Veeman, 1987:993).

With the escalation of World War Two, Canada’s exports of eggs to the United Kingdom increased. Exports peaked in 1947 but by the 1950s, with the return of post-war production, there was no longer an external demand for Canadian eggs. In turn, the 1950s were marked by a series of “boom and bust” cycles for Canadian farmers. In an attempt to protect local markets, many of the provincial boards sought to limit imports from other provinces. This led to a proliferation of retaliatory restrictions on the interprovincial sale of eggs in the early 1970s (Veeman 1987; Safarian *et al.* 1974; Skogstad 1980). These trade wars served as yet another catalyst for egg producers to seek federal regulations.

According to Veeman (1987:994) the series of “egg price wars reinforced political pressure for passage of federal legislation to enable national market-sharing programs.” Specifically, the Federal government responded to pressure from farmer lobby groups by legislating the 1972 *Farm Products Agencies Act*. With the passing and enactment by Parliament of the *Act*, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) was established by proclamation. The *Act* identifies the Agency’s responsibilities as the

effective management of the production, pricing, distribution and disposition of eggs in Canada and the promotion of the sale of eggs.

While the push for a national supply management scheme came from farmers, the government still had to promote the plan and they did so on the basis of three arguments (Green 1983:408). First, due to a variety of factors including natural conditions, unpredictable shifts in supply and static price demand for commodities, farm incomes have been historically unstable. Marketing boards have the capacity to alleviate unpredictability and ensure stabilized income through regulated markets. The second argument, which corresponds to the first, was that the “average net farm income is low, with many farmers receiving subnormal returns on their investment in farm land and equipment” (Green 1983:408). Finally, agricultural marketing boards offer farmers greater negotiating power. As Christopher Green (1983:408) explains, “for commodities which are locally processed or consumed, the individual farmer’s bargaining power is typically weak relative to those who transport, process and distribute farm products.” The establishment of national supply management agencies also worked effectively to protect the Canadian market against cheap imports that were clearly detrimental to the livelihood of Canadian farmers. In fact, the federal government required a national level scheme in order to restrict imports, thereby protecting the national egg market.²⁶

²⁶ Article XI of the GATT (see appendix 2) prohibits the use of quotas or measures other than duties to restrict export and imports. However, under this article, a national government could impose a quota system when necessary to enforce a domestic supply management program. As long as the provincial boards maintained jurisdiction over egg supply and production (and other agricultural commodities), the government could not impose trade restrictions on agricultural commodity imports. Simply stated, national regulations made it possible to restrict imports thereby protecting the national market.

The Supply Management System

The Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) is a centralized board that holds effective monopoly power over the production and marketing of eggs in Canada. Specifically, the *Agricultural Products Marketing Act* (1985) gives CEMA the legislative authority to govern the marketing of eggs in interprovincial and export trade. The stated purpose of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency is to establish national production allocations, manage an Industrial Products Program and equitably ensure adequate supplies. From their perspective, this is best accomplished through the development and maintenance of a stable market by controlling production through a quota system. However, many sustainable farmers disagree. The marketing board system does not adequately address rising consumer demand for sustainably produced eggs reared outside of the conventional system. Sally Dailly explained to me that:

Well, yeah the thing is, the ones [marketing boards] that came in the seventies... they [producers] were allotted quota, so they were allotted a lot of value. And now that it's so much value anyway, you have to buy it and you know. It's kind of crazy... But I have such mixed feelings about it, I guess when they [the Marketing Board] add it up, it's [sustainable egg production] taking part of their market so they want it, right. On the other hand it's a very small part and the consumer demand is there, so they're not meeting that part of the consumer demand. You know, they're doing pretty darn well with what they are doing, and so is it worth messing with it, except that they want the whole thing.

Harry Warner echoes Sally's sentiments. He argues that the egg marketing board has "the Microsoft attitude: '95 percent is not enough, we want it all'" (Knox 2005:C1).

The BC Egg Marketing Board (BCEMB), also known as the BC Egg Producers, has jurisdiction over all eggs sold off farm in the province and the production of eggs from all flocks with over ninety-nine laying hens. According to their Orders, anyone with ninety-nine layers or less is exempt from registering with the Board. This system is

complex. Figure 4 provides a very simplified map outlining the various legal production options BC egg farmers have depending on the number of hens they raise and how they sell their eggs. The BC Egg Order, contained within the *Agricultural Products Marketing Act*, provides the legal framework for the establishment of the BC Egg Marketing Board under the national framework.²⁷ The Order gives the BCEMB the “authority to regulate the marketing in interprovincial and export trade of eggs and egg products produced in British Columbia.”

The BC Egg Marketing Board and the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands agree that farmers with fewer than ninety-nine laying hens are exempt from licensing, grading and quota requirements, providing that the eggs are sold on the farm. That means that anyone with over ninety-nine laying hens must hold quota or apply for an exemption. At the federal level, CEMA estimates the number of eggs necessary to meet the national demand then uses this number to determine the total national number of quota units (one unit is equal to one hen) and assign the units to provincial and territorial marketing boards according a formula established by the board. Peter Whitlock of the BC Egg Producers explained “CEMA changes allocations to the provinces periodically, not necessarily each year.” The national quota (Quota Order) must be approved by the National Farm Products Council (NFPC) before being accepted by the Governor in Council. It is the responsibility of the regional boards to distribute quota to producers.

²⁷ In British Columbia, eight marketing boards administer schemes; five of these are supply managed and three are regulated industries. The supply managed boards are the BC Broiler Hatching Egg Commission, the BC Chicken Marketing Board, the BC Egg Marketing Board, the BC Milk Marketing Board and the BC Turkey Marketing Board. Regulated industries include the BC Cranberry Marketing Commission, the BC Hog Marketing Commission and the BC Vegetable Marketing Commission.

Farmers who obtained quota at the outset of the marketing system in lottery in the early 1970s profited from the marketing systems and were able to continue to buy quota as it became available. Quota was quickly concentrated in the hands of a few large companies that have the capital to buy quota as it came available. As a result, now the sale of quota tends to happen in large bundles, usually when a farmer retires and sells off her/his quota. Most sustainable farmers are not able to afford, nor do they desire owning such a large amount of quota. At the same time, large industrial producers are the only ones financially capable of absorbing the high cost of quota as well as the high costs of raising hens.

“The only people that can afford to handle that level of bureaucracy and paper work are the big boys”

Grading and inspection, not just quotas are a significant component of the egg scheme in British Columbia. While the marketing boards control production and define grades, it is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) that is tasked with licensing and inspecting the grading facilities. CFIA inspectors across Canada monitor grading operations and take random food samples from egg grading and egg processing stations for laboratory analysis to verify compliance with food safety regulations and product standards.

Inspectors become certified through an accreditation program involving training modules, field experience, and written and practical examinations. To clarify, CFIA inspectors do not grade the eggs; rather, egg graders are hired by operators of grading stations to do this work. Grading stations wishing to sell eggs off the farm must obtain a grading license from the CFIA. An individual or corporation does not have to have quota to operate a grading station but they must demonstrate to the CFIA that they meet all the requirements

of the Egg Regulations (found within the *Canada Agricultural Products Act*). The CFIA can suspend or cancel registration of a federal grading facility if the operator does not comply with the regulations.

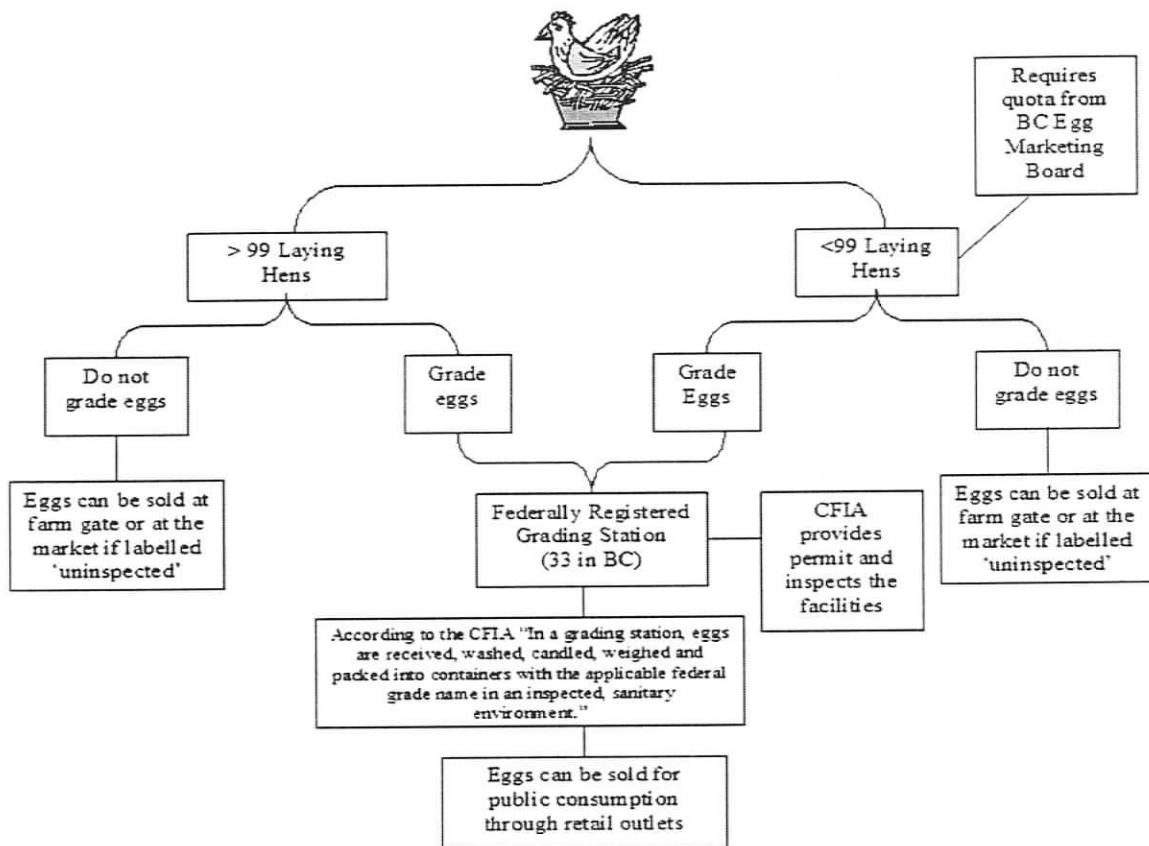


Figure 5: Options for BC Egg Farmers

Grading takes into consideration factors of interior quality, weight, cleanliness and shell construction. Eggs are transferred from on-farm or from other farms to the grading station where they are kept in sanitary, refrigerated holding areas, separate from the area where the eggs are graded. The eggs are washed and sanitized in water that has been regulated for both temperature and acidic balance. The eggs are then held up to or pass over a bright light, usually on a conveyor belt that rolls the eggs, allowing graders to

examine the eggs' outer surface. This technique, commonly called candling, makes visible the internal contents of the egg, allowing graders to identify internal defect such as blood spots, meat spots or rot. Candling also illuminates cracks, dirt and stains. Eggs are weighed and sorted according to size category for Grade A eggs (Jumbo, Extra Large, Large, Medium, Small, Peewee).²⁸ Grade A requirements imply that the eggs are suitable for public consumption. The eggs are then packed and stored in a grader cooler until transported to their retail destination.

As I explored earlier, grading has been done efficiently by farm women for generations and while the grading system is touted as a science-based system of inspection that protects consumers against disease, it is the opinion of many sustainable farmers that grading can be done efficiently and safely, on farm, without the technologies and infrastructure currently mandated. Transporting eggs to one of BC's thirty-three grading stations increases costs for farmers and eliminates the direct link between producer and consumer.

Expanding the Market

The farming of eggs has morphed into an industry and is currently regulated and operated as such, with little concern for the health of the environment and the wellbeing

²⁸ According to the Egg Regulations, Schedule 1 (Grade Requirements), "an egg may be graded as Canada A if, in addition to meeting the requirements set out in section 4 of these Regulations,"

- (a) the egg shows on candling
 - (i) a reasonably firm albumen,
 - (ii) an indistinct yolk outline,
 - (iii) a round yolk that is reasonably well centered, and
 - (iv) an air cell that is not in excess of 5 mm in depth, and
- (b) the shell
 - (i) has not more than three stain spots, the aggregate area of which does not exceed an area equivalent to 25 mm² and the shell is otherwise free of dirt and stain,
 - (ii) is normal or nearly normal in shape but may have rough areas and ridges other than heavy ridges, and
 - (iii) is uncracked.

of the hens. While there is a great deal of resentment towards this system it has proved difficult to make changes for a few key reasons. The primary reason, according to the farmers with whom I spoke, is that those with quota make the rules and are unlikely to support changes that could jeopardise their operations. Second, jurisdiction and power are widely dispersed. The egg system in Canada is a complex one involving numerous players. I have already explained the impact of this when I wrote that cross-sectional distribution of responsibility and jurisdiction is indicative of the diffusion of power in late capitalist societies. This diffusion results in fragmentation which obfuscates power and makes resistance increasingly difficult. However, farmers are resisting in myriad ways, only some of which are illuminated in the Saltspring Island egg wars.

With the onset of the new millennium, organic farmers and advocates began voicing concern over increased pressure that marketing boards were exerting on organic producer to comply with mainstream systems. In May of 2003, a coalition of retailers, distributors and home delivery companies sent a letter to the Premier outlining their concerns and requesting legislative changes to support organics within the supply management schemes. That same year, the BC Farm Industry Review Board (FIRB) began a review of specialty production and new entrant programs across the five supply-managed sectors with the goal of developing or updating programmes for specialty production and markets and facilitating the entry of new producers.

In the fall of that year FIRB directed BC's five supply-management Boards to review and assess the specialty production and marketing of their commodities, however, this review was suspended on August 25, 2004, pending the outcomes of a report prepared by George Leroux for the then Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. The

report, *Recommendations for Managing Speciality Agri-Food Products in BC's Supply Managed System*, was released in January 2005 and included a recommended policy framework.

The report was intended to “provide a framework to help parties communicate and focus on growing the supply management industries in BC” (Leroux 2005:3). Major recommendations included:

- That all producers in supply managed sectors, regardless of size, class or product register with Boards;
- Specialty production and marketing should be managed using a distinct and restricted quota class;
- Specialty producers should have board representation; and
- Specialty product advisory committees should be established.

Following the release of the report, FIRB resumed their review of specialty production. At this point stakeholders were invited to provide recommendations. On September 1, 2005, FIRB released a report titled *Specialty Market and New Entrant Submissions: Policy, Analysis, Principles and Directions*. With the release of this report, FIRB issued general directions to the five boards. The Boards were required to make changes to their existing Orders so as to comply with the new directions. The Boards then had to submit their Orders to FIRB for review and approval prior to implementation. Today, all of the new Orders are in the process of being implemented. FIRB and the marketing boards are constantly reviewing the Orders.

It is important to clarify that under the purview of the marketing boards, organic products fall under the category of “specialty” products. The *Leroux Report* and FIRB’s *Policy, Analysis, Principles and Directions* state that specialty products should respect the principles of farm-based differentiation, identify preservation, marketing and

representation of the unique farm-based attributes to the end consumer. As well, there should be third party certification by skilled and reputable accreditation organizations in order to meet the conditions of licensing for all designated specialty product classes.

In FIRB's *Directions* each marketing board was instructed to strike Special Markets Advisory Committees. FIRB recommended that the committees be comprised of an independent chair appointed by the Board, plus three specialty producers and three specialty processors. They were also clear that each class of quota should be managed separately and that quota could be transferred within classes but not between. FIRB directed the Boards to establish new entrant programs that gave priority to new producers wanting to produce specialty products or serve regional markets where there is identified specialty and/or regional market need. Also, as a way of building trust between specialty and mainstream producers, FIRB suggested that it would be useful to have mainstream producer representation, as in a director from the board, and reciprocally that a specialty representative sit on any mainstream advisory committees.

Post-review, the BCEMB has determined that third party certified organics eggs are classified as Specialty Eggs and are eligible for Specialty Quota and at the moment, free range and free run eggs are considered to be regular layer quota. However, the BCEMB does define free range and free run eggs as "specialty" for most purposes except quota insurance. The Egg Board is in the process of developing a certification process for free range and free run eggs that should be complete in 2009.

As it stands, regular quota producers may switch to organic if the market requires and if they acquire third-party organic certification. These producers can switch back to regular production again with the board's approval. Holders of specialty quota are

restricted to the production of specialty products for the first ten years of the quota insurance. All producers, regardless of quota type, pay the same levies.

The BCEMB has established a Specialty Committee consisting of four producers of specialty eggs who are appointed by the Board. According to their Order, one producer must be COABC certified, one producer must be a free run producer and one producer must be a free range producer. The board also appoints two "Egg Processors or graders" at least one which is COABC certified.

In an attempt to open up the market, the BCEMB recently created the Small Lot Authorization Program up to a maximum of ten thousand layers. Under this program, individuals with more than ninety-nine layers and fewer than three hundred and ninety-nine layers can apply to the board annually to be exempt from obtaining a licence, registering as a Registered Producers and paying marketing licencing fees. With this exemption, producers are not allowed to sell their eggs commercially and they are not eligible to vote on BCEMB matters. As well, the conditions of the program outline that the producer must be certified organic or certified organic heritage breed by a board-approved third-party certification process. Priority access to this program is given to organic applicants in regions outside of the Fraser Valley.

The FIRB review also mandated all of the Boards to develop a New Entrant Program that would issue New Entrant Quota annually to at least two producers who have never held quota before. The program is an attempt by FIRB to expand the number of producers in the supply-managed sectors. As Figures 6 highlights, the number of registered egg producers in the province has been steadily declining since the late 1980s. At the same time, the number of eggs being graded has been increasing (see Figure 6) as

have the average number of laying hens raised by registered producers (see Figure 7). Under the New Entrant programs, if the market conditions warrant it, and if quota is available, New Entrant Quota is issued on a graduated basis:

- 0-2yrs - up to 1,000 layers
- 3-5yrs - up to 1,000 additional layers
- 6-7yrs - up to 1,000 additional layers

Two New Entrant programs have been established by the BCEMB: Regular New Entrant program and Specialty New Entrant program. Producers receive quota through the program at no cost. However, levies are payable if the eggs are graded through a Federally Registered Grading station. The BC Egg Producers explained to me that:

In the future, all [new] quota allocations will be split between specialty and non-specialty quota holders. While the allocations will be pro-rated to the producers within the two groups the percentage increase to the two groups does not have to be equal.

There is a waiting list for each of the New Entrant Programs. While quota is given free of cost, applicants must pay a two hundred and fifty dollar non-refundable application fee to be considered. Once the application fee has been paid, applicants are placed on a list. The lists are maintained for a year at which time producers must pay a one hundred dollar renewal fee.

Figure 6: Number of Registered Egg Producers in BC and Average Number of Layers per Registered Producer in BC by Year²⁹

Source: CEMA Annual Reports 1990-2005, CEMA Data Download (online)

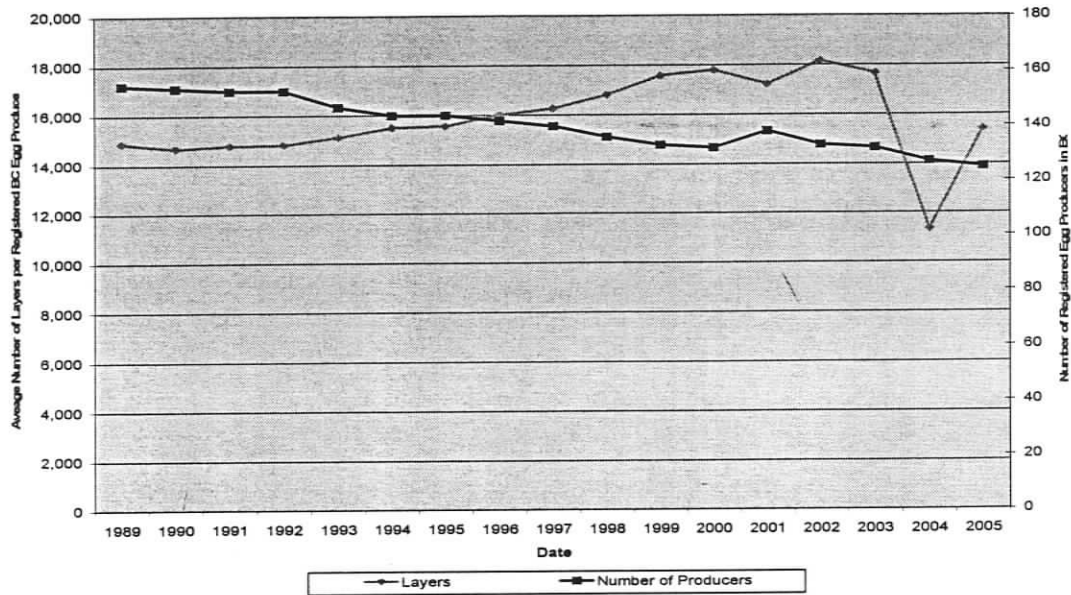
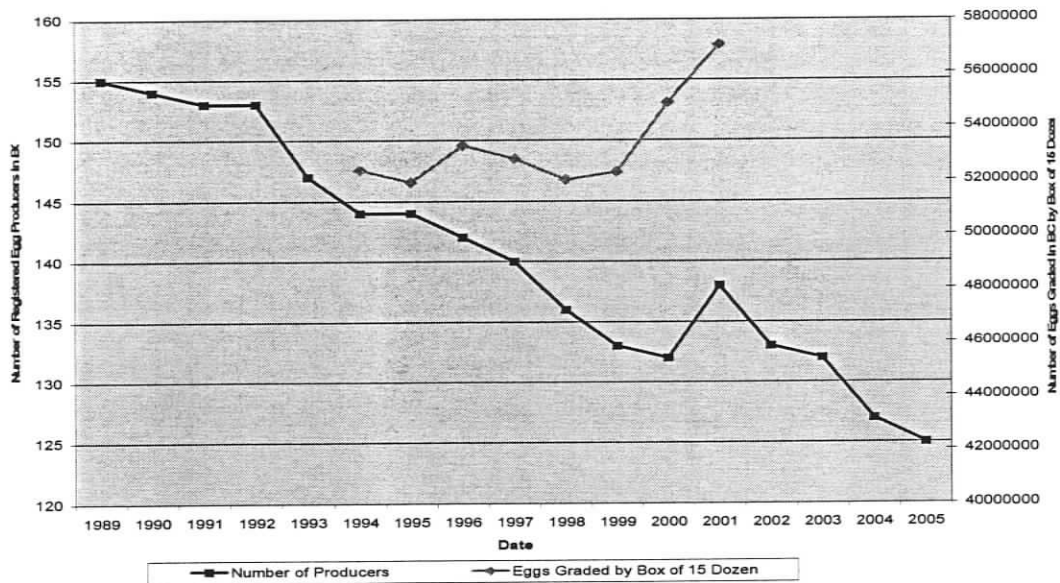


Figure 7: Total Number of Registered Egg Producers and Volume of Egg Production in BC by Year³⁰

Source: CEMA Annual Reports 1990-2005, CEMA Data Download (online)



²⁹ The drop in average number of layers in 2004 is attributed to the Avian Flu outbreak in BC's Fraser Valley.

³⁰ Data for number of eggs graded by province is only available from 1994-2001.

I have already explained how farming in BC and across Canada is overwhelmingly economically unviable. I have also discussed how the national supply-management scheme was developed to help secure stable revenue for farmers. Supply-management programs across Canada have accomplished this goal by way of regulated markets and due to this success, the program is sometimes forwarded as a solution to low economic returns and traditionally unstable markets. Many sustainable farmers support the idea of a cooperative marketing structure that ensures fair prices for farmers and consumers by way of regulated markets. But they also have serious reservations about the way that the system is structured. To be clear, this is not a case of the stereotyped sustainable farmer as rugged individualist who is inherently anti-government.³¹ Most sustainable farmers are not anti-regulation. For example, organic farmers are arguably some of the most highly regulated farmers in Canada and they choose to be so. As Fred Reid told me:

Organics... I mean we did everything by the book. You know... Organics are the only ones who have done it, who have really done it to the nth degree... We are the only ones who could comply with the Food Choice and Disclosure Act, a very onerous process which invited more inspection, but we did it and it was a very onerous process.

When it comes to sustainable farming and the BCEMB the first major site of contention emerges from fundamental differences in worldviews. For the BCEMB, the primary concern is market stability and meeting market demand, thus more often than not, their interest in organics is spurred on less by an ideological propensity towards a certain style of agriculture production but more as a way to supply consumers with what they want. This is not to say that organic farmers are not concerned with markets and securing income, because this is clearly not the case. Rather, I mean to suggest that the

³¹This is an observation that I made in the field. It relates to ideas that are developed in a more sophisticated form in several chapters in Roger Epp and Dave Whitson's (2001) book "Writing Off the Rural West."

work of farming otherwise is often ideologically opposed to the industrial model of farming and thus sustainable farmers approach organics less as a marketing opportunity and more as a socially and ecologically responsible way to produce food.

There is also a desire on the part of many sustainable farmers to see increased exemption levels across supply-managed sectors, for example, increasing the number of laying hens an individual can raise without registering with the BCEMB from ninety-nine to four hundred and ninety-nine (which is the exemption rate in Alberta). Realistic exemption levels remove the burden of enforcement and allow small producers the opportunity to market modest amounts of locally produced products without the fear of legal consequence. Increased exemption levels will also allow smaller producers to experiment with new markets and products before approaching the marketing boards as new entrants. Also, increased exemption levels support the trend in sustainable farming towards 'closed-loop' systems.

Those sustainable farmers wishing to market their eggs within the marketing board structure are restricted by the cost of quota. Quota has assumed a monetary value and is now traded as a commodity. Today, one laying hen, which is the equivalent of one unit of quota, carries a value of approximately one hundred and twenty five dollars in BC. When your income is marginal, as is the case for most sustainable farmers, the cost of quota is restrictive.

The FIRB review was undertaken to help expand the specialty markets. Indeed, at first glance it appears that the marketing board is making room for the organics sector. However, sustainable farmers are understandably threatened by this shift. This is a clear example of the "Microsoft attitude" that Harry Warner spoke about: the BCEMB is

working hard to gain control over the entire egg market in BC. For many sustainable producers, the new focus on specialty production means simply the establishment of a legal means for the Boards to control an alternative market that sustainable producers have spent years building. Many of the farmers I have spoken with understand that with the development of Specialty Quota the marketing boards are able to positioning themselves in such a way to legitimate their monopoly over the market. The current regulations are restricting new and sustainable producers. John Wilcox believes that meeting the requirements of the current regulatory structure is simply too difficult for many producers. He explained that faced with

the prospect of trying to meet the new standard ... a lot of guys are just saying to hell with it and they are getting out. They are not going to try to do it, so ... people just don't know how much they have to commit.

The standards and regulations of the BCEMB that sustainable producers are required to uphold do not correspond to the scale of their operations. Nor do they address raising consumer demand for sustainably produced eggs. The regulations also contradict the sustainable ethic of many farmers. Fred Reid is very clear on his reasons for trying to farm outside of the marketing system, reiterating my observation of a difference in worldviews which stands in the way of any joint marketing system for sustainable and industrial eggs. He explains in a public letter to his customers that:

Olera Farms has steadfastly refused to join marketing boards and pay the quota charges and levies that support cage layer production and subsidies the supply of cheap eggs for the purpose of making shampoos. I do not want to pay this levy because I cannot justify the increase in price of organic eggs for the purpose of supporting a form of agriculture that is so contrary to the principles of organic agriculture. The cost of joining the marketing board system would increase the cost of Olera Farms eggs by 95 cents/dozen. Organic eggs are already twice the price of conventional

eggs. The added cost of a dollar without any benefit to the organic community is totally unjustified.

In another letter he wrote:

[t]he marketing boards sell quotas and charge levies to produce certain commodities and then this money is used, in part, to buy up surpluses of the commodities. This means that if organic farmers are to buy quotas in the 'conventional' system, they are supporting the very type of agriculture they are opposed to.

This difference in approach funnels down to policies that are designed for large operations but applied equally to all farms. Sustainable producers are frustrated that they are consistently left out of developing policies that affect them directly. For example, supply-managed commodities have developed national on-farm food safety practices without input from the organic sector or other alternative producers. This is not to say that some sustainable producers have not tried. For almost two decades the BC Association for Regenerative Agriculture (BCARA) and the Coalition of Organic Association of BC (COABC) have been trying to establish alternative marketing schemes for organic eggs.³² In 1991, the BCARA approached the BC Egg Marketing Board (BCEMB) to develop organic standards for egg producers. The BCEMB declined the offer. According to Fred Reid:

At no time have the marketing boards offered to incorporate organic agriculture in a way that would also benefit organic agriculture. The marketing boards do have farms that will produce organically in one barn under the marketing board system. However these same farmers often have many other barns that still produce in a conventional way. Their other barns still have cage layers or they will still have hens fed grains that are produced with pesticides. They will still feed genetically engineered corn, soy, and canola. They will still feed animal by-products to their hens and spray the hens and barns with pesticides. Marketing boards will now say that they have organic farmers that support the marketing board

³² For a review of this struggle see appendix D

system. The consumer must ask these farms how committed they are to the principles of organic and humane agriculture on all of the farms that they own. ...

Sustainable producers must have the opportunity to provide input into appropriate (but compliant) on-farm food-safety protocols. To be clear, all producers must follow food safety laws regardless of their level of production. However, it is not appropriate to infer that small producers, by virtue of their size, circumvent food safety laws. At the same time, it is important to recognise that food safety regulations and have been drafted with large, industrial-style production in mind.

The recent move by the marketing boards towards regulating organic production works to diffuse, fragment and incorporate part of the opposition. This is indicative of passive revolution. As I noted earlier, the ruling network engages in passive revolution by allowing the hegemonic arrangement to shift in ways that are not necessarily in their immediate interest. Nevertheless, they also are quick to find ways of capitalizing from these changes. The development of Specialty Quota is illustrative of how those imbedded in the regulatory food regime are finding ways to capitalise on growing consumer demand for sustainably produced food. One must also remember that certified organic farmers are but a small percent of those who farm otherwise. Thus the small concession to organic egg production deflects from the gradual eradication of the large number of non-certified organic farmers who farm otherwise. The risk of this is that the guiding ethics and practices of the sustainable movement, which emerged in opposition to industrial production, become sidelined as the movement tries to compete with the regulatory food regime for consumer interest and consumer dollars. This plays out discursively through media campaigns, educational campaigns and price wars. The

regulatory food regime recognises increasing demand for organic eggs and other specialty eggs and selling these eggs becomes the goal. However, for sustainable farmers, this is not the goal and reducing food choices to organic versus non-organic stifles their resistance. The goal is safe, just and healthy food systems which are achieved through sustainable farming practices and increased citizen awareness. However, when the discourse becomes reduced to “local” and “organic,” the means become the end and the struggle loses out. Here, large corporations and governments have been able to incorporate resistance by way of controlling public discourse or by creating alternative certification processes that do very little to address the systemic problems the original movement sought to challenge (i.e., monoculture farming and food miles).

From a small-scale sustainable farmers’ perspective, the current egg supply-management system acts as judge, jury and executioner; creating the rules that govern themselves and ultimately every other egg producer in the province. They are keen to penetrate new markets, including the organic and ethical markets that have been expanding. It is thus not surprising to see policies aimed at ensuring economic gains and that are not overtly concerned with health considerations (be it human or environmental). We must also remember that the system was created to limit the number of eggs produced in order to ensure the economic sustainability of Canada’s egg farmers.

What has become most apparent to me from my analysis, is that the whole system is steeped in ambiguities. Some farmers are calling for the restructuring of the Marketing Board while still others are calling for it to be disbanded and others want it to continue unchanged. Since its inception, supply management has ensured stable markets for quota holders. Citing a survey that the national marketing boards commissioned in 2003, these

agencies contend that sixty-four per cent of all *quota holding* producers felt their on-farm income was enough to make a living. That level jumped to eighty-seven per cent for egg farmers and eighty per cent for all other supply management farmers (CEMA 2003:40). However consider a report by the National Farmers Union (2005) titled *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profit*. This report illuminates:

In 2004, Canadian farmers' Realized Net Income from the markets (Market Net Income)—a measure that subtracts out government payments—fell to *negative* \$10,000 per farm. The only year worse than 2004 was 2003, when per-farm Market Net Income was negative \$16,000.

There is no doubt that the current supply management system has benefited farmers who won quota back in 1967. Farmers, who have quota, and lots of it, benefit from this system. They consistently earn more for their eggs than their US counterparts although they tend to have almost half as many layers. They are well represented at trade negotiations and on Parliament Hill. However, these farmers do not make up the majority of farmers in Canada, though they do produce the majority of the eggs. It is estimated that ninety to ninety-five percent of Canada's farmers produce only five percent of the market value of food consumed in Canada (Paulson 2004). For new farmers, farmers who farm otherwise and farmers wishing to serve alternative markets (organic, specialty) this system has created an overwhelming financial barrier to entering into the agricultural market. As I explained above, quota has gained a trading value and today, the value of quota for one layer is approximately one-hundred and twenty-five dollars in BC.

Finally, I have to be extremely cautious writing up and presenting my analysis of the egg marketing scheme in Canada. My goal has been to highlight problems and limitations inherent to the current marketing structure and the broader scheme from the standpoint of sustainable farmers by illuminating local and extra-local barriers to

sustainable food production and sales. I must be very clear that in this thesis I am in no way advocating a dismantling or deconstruction the federal supply management system.³³

³³ I would like to thank Dr. Alex Ostry for his comments on a presentation I made at the 2006 Canadian Association of Food Studies meeting. Dr. Ostry astutely noted that the marketing boards have protected many Canadian farmers. Furthermore, he cautioned that a critique of the system could be taken and used to rationalize efforts to dismantle such entities. Such an interpretation would be incorrect.

Chapter 6

Data Collection

When I first undertook this project I quickly realised that it was difficult to effectively communicate the lived experiences of sustainable farmers and that I was naïve to have assumed the existence of a homogeneous sustainable farmers' voice. I found myself retelling the farmers' stories in such a way that no action or new knowledge could be extracted from the text. I came to realise that the farmers know their own story and those who have the power to make changes to policy have already heard these stories numerous times. So the issues were not ones of communication but rather different interests and political positioning vis-à-vis some of the most important challenges most Canadian food consumers face (but do not see).³⁴

At this point, I struggled on a very personal level with my role as a researcher. I was torn between my desire to create a document that was accessible to the general public but that also met academic requirements and could further my academic prospects. I was equally torn between my activist convictions and my theoretical leanings. I also began to understand (with not too subtle hints from farmers) the impacts and implications of research. Many explained to me through informal conversations that they viewed research as a stalling technique of the government, or when undertaken by academics, a waste of their time and a potential threat to their community. From their perspective, governments delay and restrict much needed funding on the basis of "sound" research

³⁴ Consumers are increasingly alienated from their food source, a source that is currently facing significant threats. Environmental changes brought on by increased climate variability are making farming increasingly difficult. While consumers are waking up to these realities of the dominant food system, what consumers do not see are the structural conditions that make producing and selling food locally very difficult.

undertaken by “experts” brought in from outside (urban) the communities. These farmers see academics – still entrenched in an institution that has yet to reconcile the ontological shift to grounded, community-supporting research – coming into communities, taking what they need and leaving, with little concern or continued communication with the community. The question of ownership and of what happens to research and how it is used does not sit well with many farmers. One food activist from the Kootenays explained:

I think that in the Kootenays, the fact that all farmers are small-scale and have no proximity to any major academic institutions means that their research needs and farm-based knowledge simply have nowhere to go. There is inadequate outreach from a university like UBC to the “hinterlands.” We [Kootenay Organic Growers Society] did undertake a farm-based cover crop research project a few years back. We hired an individual who was relatively new to the area and farming but he had a Masters degree in agriculture from [the University of] California in Davis. In my opinion, the research outcomes were pretty much useless. There was a fairly high level of frustration on the part of the farmers (at least the experienced ones) with the researcher since his obsession with scientific methodology and small plots had little to do with their experience of reality on the farms. He was also an enthusiastic promoter of a cover crop that all the farmers here have long (i.e., 20 years) experience of as an ineradicable pest once it is introduced. He seemed incapable of matching his research with the specific needs and interests of the farmers in the area. This may have been primarily a personality issue since this particular individual is rather hesitant when it comes to human interactions but rather pigheaded in doing things his way in the end. To be more objective about it all, I would say that the problem rested with not knowing the individual well enough and leaving the research design completely in his hands, instead of facilitating and enabling more input from the farmers on what the whole research project would look like. The farmers I know are very knowledgeable about their farms and walk the fields or pastures every day, at least once, to observe what is going on with the plants and animals. They know the impact of weather extremes, changes, of different plant combinations, of new pests. Their frame of reference is the whole farm and it is assessed daily. But the scientific model that our researcher ascribed to was about having controlled factors so as to come up with an absolute and universal outcome. Fundamentally it is about a different world view - one that is firmly rooted in the local reality and the ongoing and changing elements of that reality, and the

other one that wants to determine an outcome that can be replicated in another identical trial or research project. . . . One more thought regarding farmers and research: fundamentally any of the good ones [farmers] are doing it constantly - by observing the day to day life on the farm they are able to assess what is working and what needs tweaking, to assess which plants and animals handled the cold wet spring or hot dry summer, sudden temperature changes etc.

After a minor existential crisis and a near rejection of my role as a researcher, I started to seriously re-evaluate my overall purpose. What I have ended up with is a melding of a theoretical exploration and empirical examination of the disjuncture between sustainable egg production and the egg marketing system. I have, to the best of my abilities, grounded my analysis in the knowledge of the sustainable farmers I have had the opportunity to speak with and learn from. I relied heavily on the knowledge these individuals shared with me. I also relied on my thesis supervisor, Dr. Martha McMahon and committee member Dr. Ken Hatt, who helped guide me through the research and analysis of this thesis. They shared experiential knowledge that provided me with insights on how to conduct interviews and how to link theoretical considerations to the data I had collected in ways that did not objectify the farmers. They also constantly reminded to ground my work in the farmers' experiences. Dr. Hatt spent a great deal of time helping me connect what I had learnt from farmers to what I was reading in Gramsci and Foucault. Dr. McMahon spent hours showing me how to tone down my academic elitist tendencies, as she called them in her comments one draft of this paper. My own socialisation and academic training has me referencing texts and in the process I am actively devaluing the kind of knowledge I proclaim to want to uncover. That being said, there is merit in some academic-type knowledge and texts and I was heavily influenced

by methodological and theoretical texts. I tried to the best of my abilities to use these texts in ways that supported what I was hearing from farmers.

I have also taken guidance from Dorothy Smith. Dr. Smith's teachings shaped the way I approached my data collection and analysis and the outcomes of my research are inseparable from the approach that I have undertaken.³⁵ Throughout my research I have engaged with a wide range of data collection techniques. Following Smith and McMahan, I have used everyday knowledge as a site of inquiry in the organization of sustainable egg production. Here, narratives and conversations become data to be analysed to highlight links between lived experiences and broad socio-structural processes. I collected this everyday knowledge through a series of interviews and conversations over the course of one year (September 2005 to October 2006). I used open-ended interviews to talk to people and to learn how things work. My aim throughout my interviews was to "elicit talk that will not only illuminate a particular circumstance but also point toward next steps in an ongoing, cumulative inquiry into translocal processes" (DeVault and McCoy 2002:753). DeVault and McCoy (2002:757) explains that:

[g]iven that the purpose of interviewing is to build up an understanding of the coordination of activity in multiple sites, the interviews need not be standardized. Rather, each interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to learn about a particular piece of the extended relational chain, to check the developing picture of the coordinative process, and to become aware of additional questions that need attention.

³⁵ By outlining my approach, I am not seeking to conform to any academic expectations. Rather, I am responding to the insistence of many feminist scholars (see for example, Naples 2003; Harding 1987, Smith 1987; Haraway 1991) on observing the association between epistemologies, methodologies and research methods. I understand that the methods I choose and how these methods are employed is deeply shaped by my epistemological stance. I thus present this methodological overview as a way of contextualizing and further grounding my research.

My sampling frame included small-scale farmers on Saltspring Island, as well as federal and provincial employees involved in the egg system. It also included farmers from across the province, many of whom produced eggs. I had very little trouble gaining access to key people that I wanted to interview as a result of connections made as an employee of both the BC Ministry of Health and the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and through my work with the BC Food Systems Network Society.³⁶

I began by engaging in open-ended, face-to-face interviews as a way to begin to understand the everyday world of the small-scale farmer. I used purposeful sampling methods, selecting my first participants through convenience sampling. More specifically, I reviewed the Saltspring Island Farmers Market website and went to the local farmers contact page. From there I scanned the descriptions of the farms and sent e-mails to three farmers who mentioned that they sold eggs. All three responded to my e-mail, although it turned out that none of those farmers actually sold eggs at the market. From there I employed snowball sampling techniques to connect with other informants.

Overall, I participated in thirteen formal interviews with farmers (see figure 8). By formal interviews I mean interviews that I set up and where participants sign participant consent forms. Due to technological problems, three of the formal interviews did not record properly and could thus not be transcribed. For four other interviews I did not have access to recording equipment. This resulted in significant problems at the writing stage as I was often unable to use the farmer's own words to describe a particular event or circumstance.

³⁶ The BC Food Systems Network is a collection of food activists, farmers, researchers, students, academics, health workers, policy makers and frontline workers all committed to the mission of the network: to work together to eliminate hunger and create food security for all residents of British Columbia. More information is available at the Network's website <http://www.fooddemocracy.org>.

Participant Category	Number of Interviews
Saltspring Island Sustainable Egg Farmers	4
Saltspring Island Sustainable Farmers	1
Egg Farmers in BC	4
Government/Marketing Boards	4
TOTAL:	13

Figure 8: Formal Interview Breakdown

I also conducted countless informal interviews (i.e., had conversations) with Saltspring Island residents and sustainable farmers from across the province. These interviews often happened at the spur of the moment, in passing. After these conversations I would write down the information that had been shared. These conversations, which occurred haphazardly, provided me with invaluable insight and knowledge into the culture of the island and the realities of farming across the province. I have recorded notes from nineteen such conversations. The majority of those people farmed in the Kootenays (five conversations), on the Gulf Islands (seven conversations) and in the Lower Mainland (four conversations).

These interviews and conversations provided me with a strong grounding in the everyday world of sustainable farmers, but an equal amount of my time was spent trying to fill in the gaps of this localized knowledge in an attempt to answer the research question: How is the table egg system organised? To do this I undertook more traditional research and document analysis. This process began before the interviews and continued throughout the interview process. It was a long process of scanning websites, reading government reports and scouring books and articles for information that would assist me in better understanding the table egg system in BC. I kept notes on websites that I visited and kept copies of relevant regulations. As I collected information and the structure of the egg marketing system began to reveal itself, I began drawing maps on large pieces of

flip-chart paper. The maps helped to visually represent the system, to attach relevant texts to relevant agencies and actions. It quickly became apparent that there were two main components to the table egg system: marketing and grading. I began mapping out both systems in order to understand how they were organised and connected. Dr. Hatt was conducting a similar mapping exercise and provided support and guidance on institutional mapping. Once I had constructed the maps, I distributed them to the farmers for feedback and comments. I also sent the maps out to the BC Food Systems Network listserv and the Urban Food listserv managed by the Vancouver Food Policy Council. Combined, it is estimated that these lists reach upwards of four hundred researchers, policy makers, community workers, farmers and activists. No one responded with changes or additions but some individuals wrote back requesting permission to use them. The majority of these people were academics. The lack of response or changes from farmers and civil servants is likely indicative of any combination or a lack of spare time available to BC's farmers, an overabundance of e-mail or perhaps there was simply a lack of interest.

At this point, I connected with two employees of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). They met with me and for three and a half hours. The three of us worked our way through the maps I had drawn. By the end of the morning all three of us had a better understanding of the inspection system. However, even as experts in poultry inspection, they were unable to help me with the entire map as they were not experts in egg marketing. The frustration that we experienced trying to link production, inspection and marketing on paper pales in comparison to the frustration farmers experience trying to navigate the system.

I also distributed a request for stories from sustainable egg producers through the BC Food System Network listserv, which distributes emails to two hundred and sixty four people. Members of this list responded with stories and forwarded my request to other lists. My request spread through the food community organically. For example, I found out that my request for stories was published in the summer 2006 edition of *Sound Bits*, the internet newsletter of the Small Scale Processors Association (http://www.ssfpa.net/pages/sound_bits.htm). Despite the successful distribution of my request for stories, I received few stories: two in total. These stories supported my conclusions and asked questions about my research. I have not used the stories within this paper. The call for stories was successful in making links to a key informant with the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency. This individual provided me with “insider-information” and reviewed segments of my work for accuracy, off the record.

Reflecting on my data collection, I think what proved most fruitful was the slow process of developing relationships with farmers. Taking the ferry over to Saltspring Island and driving to a farm for an hour interview proved interesting but it also presented several barriers. It has been my experience that farmers are quite open to talking about most aspects of their farming practices and often take a political stance. However, at times I felt that farmers did not trust me, although I have no direct evidence to support this. I did discuss these feelings with food researchers (non-farmers) from across the country and many have the same experience.

At the 2006 gathering of the BC Food Systems Network I co-facilitated a workshop on research and agriculture. The forum was held on the second day of the three day conference and was attended by sixteen individuals, twelve of whom farmed.

Farmers told me that within the sustainable farming community there is a culture of competition that feeds a culture of mistrust. At this session, a sustainable farmer from the lower mainland explained that many organic farmers are selling their produce wholesale to restaurants or specialty stores. Due to the generally better quality and public demand for local, organic produce, many farmers have been able to negotiate a premium sum for their product. However, she continued, often this exchange represents the bulk of their income and farmers are scared to divulge information about where and how they sell their produce for fear that someone else may try and take over that market. Another reason for a potential lack of trust in me was illuminated by one farmer from the 100 Mile House area. She stated that the eggs that are being purchased by local establishments often do not meet or address government food safety requirements. In this case, producers keep quiet in order to protect the purchaser.

In recent years, food has gained increasing momentum as a topical and popular research topic. As a result, many of the people I interviewed or talked with had been involved, in some way, in a research project. Few of them had been informed as to what had happened to the research once the researcher had left the community. In other cases, individuals were upset with how the research was used and at their lack of access to it.

Lessons Learned

This was my first real foray into academic interviewing and it was a true learning experience. Specifically, I learnt that I need to be far more systematic in my data collection, not only in how I ask questions and the information that I collect but also in how I transcribe, code and analyse the data. I absolutely need to invest in a reliable recording device, as a lot of information was lost due to lack of access to a recorder or

faulty technology. In addition, interviews conducted over the phone made data collection difficult as I often became engrossed in the conversation and less focused on recording details. I realise now that with recording equipment I can tape calls by using a speakerphone function, after getting informed consent to do so from the research participant.

In writing up this thesis I have learnt about the value of collecting localised knowledge. I realised now that I could and should have put more energy into collecting this knowledge. I was conscious of not wasting farmers' time and tried to balance that with my own research desires.

Conclusion

Public intellectual, activist and farmer Brewster Kneen often asks food activists that he meets for the first time “when they fell off the rails.” He wants to know the point at which they realised they were on a runaway train, and what made them decide to jump off. With Brewster, I conceptualise the dominant industrial food system as a runaway train. It is unsustainable, environmentally destructive and producing increasingly less healthy and less safe food. This project starts at a point of derailment: at the site of difference between what authorities *construct* as safe and what farmers *understand* to be safe and healthy food. In the case of the Saltspring Island egg wars, the train was not forced to stop, nor did it jump its rails, but the obstacles set up by the farmers who stood their ground did manage to slow the train down so that individuals on board could get a glimpse at how the egg system in British Columbia is organized.

An inquiry into the Saltspring Island egg wars, from a farmer’s perspective, highlights challenges faced by local farmers involved in the event, while also unveiling broader structural barriers faced by farmers across BC. I have deliberately not placed all my eggs into a single methodological or theoretical basket. Instead, in the first part of this thesis I presented components of social theories that helped me make sense of what farmers were telling me. I found components of Antonio Gramsci’s, Dorothy Smith’s and Michel Foucault’s work particularly helpful towards this end.

Gramsci’s work on hegemony provides a way of understanding the invasive and “common-sense” logic of neoliberalism that has permeated agriculture policy. This hegemonic arrangement has fostered a shift towards industrial agriculture and a concentration of agro-capital. The regulatory structure design around this industrial

model is fragmented from the ground up. The impact of this, as I explored, has been an influx in paper work and a complex network of organizations mediating the work of farmers. On the ground, the high-level of paperwork has proven to be an overwhelming barrier for sustainable farmers. The complicated regulatory system also makes change and or resistance extremely difficult.

As I explain in Chapter 2, I developed the term “regulatory food regime” in line with Dorothy Smith’s (1999) notion of ruling relations. Ruling relations are the network of state and corporate agencies that organize ruling. They organize society in “abstraction from local settings, extra-locally” (Smith 1999:49). The notion of the ‘extra-local’ provides a useful way of conceptualising power and economic relations in a way which does not reify them but allows us to understand how contemporary ruling is often exercised in local settings in ways that forward the interests of non-local actors.

Michel Foucault’s work on power and knowledge helps make sense of the disconnect between the state goals of the regulatory food regime and the outcomes of their agricultural policies. Foucault’s dedication to explaining how power systems are preserved through the work of institutions specializing in the production of truth and knowledge elucidates the dependence of the regulatory food regime on a scientific discourse as a way of maintaining power.

The egg management scheme in British Columbia is one fraught with ambiguity, and this is reflected in the research. As a result, I have arrived at very few conclusions or recommendations. However, this was not necessarily my goal. Rather, throughout this thesis I have tried to establish an understanding of the situation of sustainable egg producers in the context of power and to highlight the challenges faced by those who

farm otherwise. Supply management protects many Canadian farmers by ensuring better prices and markets. However, simultaneously, the system promotes industrial farming processes that are, in the opinion of many sustainable farmers, often inhumane and that have negative consequences for the environment. The current system has been designed with large-scale production in mind and the requirements do not reflect the realities of small-scale production. In some ways, these requirements may contradict the ethics of the farmer, and in other cases they may be simply financially unfeasible. The system also restricts the ability of new and alternative farmers to farm in a sustainable and just way. Like the farmers that I have talked to, I am frustrated and disillusioned with government policies that actively disregard localised knowledge and expertise, as well as the common good in favour of profit. Broad-based changes are needed within governing institutions in order to cultivate a public-service culture that respects and values people and local expertise.

This gets back to the idea of food sovereignty and our role as food citizens. We know that generally food produced on small, bio-diverse farms and consumed locally is better for us and for the environment and yet when push comes to shove, the majority of us continue to put money directly into the hands of the industrial food industry. This is understandable; they make everything so easy. Their products are readily available in grocery stores at more affordable prices. And who doesn't love having access to pineapple all year round? But the point is that we need to take responsibility for the food we eat. Food really is the intimate commodity (Winson 1993). Unlike other commodities like clothing, books, cars, ipods and computers that we buy, use, and eventually throw out, food enters our body and becomes a part of us. Furthermore, we need food to

survive. None of us are naïve to the role that food plays in our own physical health and wellbeing.

Locally and sustainably produced food is more expensive, less convenient and allows for fewer options year round. However, as I outline, there is a very complex network of ruling relations that are structured so as to maintain neoliberal hegemony. This system relies heavily on transporting food by airplane and trucks, around the world, despite evidence of irreversible climate change. This conventional food system is dependent on cheap labour and on the restructuring of the agriculture systems of entire nations to ensure cheap and ready supply. Sustainable farmers emphasize that this system uses toxic chemicals and promotes monoculture agriculture that not only depletes the soil of nutrients but also damages natural habitats and ecosystems. They will also provide you with evidence that this system forwards regulations that make sustainable farming next to impossible, including regulatory requirements that do not suit their scale of the operation.

Clair Cummings, commentator on food and farming on KPFA radio (in Guthman 2004:1) gets at what I am talking about when she states:

Care about social justice issues? Labour and employment practices by agribusiness, health problems related to pesticides [applied] by farm labour, and the security of the small family farmer are related issues. If corporate farms continue their takeover of our food supply, then these businesses and their giant trading corporate partners can set the price of basic food commodities, dictate the wage and working conditions of farm work, and put family farms out of business through consolidation of landholdings and economies of scale. Polluting farming practices and poor labour conditions are cheaper and are more likely to occur if corporations are allowed to continue taking over our food production. Preserving the family and small-scale farm that can employ alternative methods and can produce food for local consumption ensures food safety and is more environmentally sound than industrialised farming methods. ...

So while my thesis hones in on the organization of eggs, this site-specific research highlights a larger problem: the food system that we have come to depend on is not sustainable. My research has led me to conclude that we must seriously re-evaluate broader social understandings of food and focus on who produces it, how it is produced and how it comes to be consumed. It appears to me that this is all part-and-parcel of a wider social issue that we all need to seriously address: our consumption patterns. Critics of the consumer society argue that our hyper-consumption has led to massive human rights abuses, to the destruction of our environment, to massive unequal distribution of wealth, to a society where we are taught to measure our own self-worth on a scale of what we own and not what we do. This may seem a far cry from the egg wars on Saltspring Island but, at least in my mind, this is all very much connected. Our acts of consumption have ecological and political consequences. This does not mean we must all start farming, but we can certainly learn from those who live and work in opposition to the ruling relations that organize our food system – those who farm otherwise.

In our post-modern/late capitalist world, where resistance is quickly re-embedded to strengthen hegemony, how do we actively engage in resistance? One day over lunch I asked Paddy Doherty, an organic farmer from Quesnel and the Canada Organic Initiative Co-ordinator, about organic farmers and their active resistance of the conventional agriculture system. He explained that, at least for him and his counterparts, it was never about resisting a system; it was about staying true to one's own belief. I asked him if we could call this a sustainable ethic and he replied, "yes, ethic or you could call it an organic philosophy." I considered what he said and came to realise that my own

consumer choices are motivated in part by a desire to resist a flawed and harmful system, but primarily by my own ethics, by what I understand to be good.

When I started this research project I conceptualised organic and sustainable farming as a reaction, but now I understand it as a spiritual and/or ethical choice. At the same time, our society is set up in such a way that upholding a sustainable ethic or a social ethic is made extremely difficult. I do not know how many activist meetings I have attended where the mantra “we need to find a way make the good choices easier to make” has been repeated. With William Carroll (2006), I agree that the possibility of transformative change exists in concrete political initiatives. Indeed, I see this as the next step: we need concrete political initiatives aimed at facilitating the good choices.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Agribusiness: Agribusiness is quite simply agriculture operated by business. Agribusiness focuses on the production, processing and distribution of agricultural products and tends to produce cash crops through monoculture production.

Egg: Throughout this thesis, unless otherwise stated, I use the term egg to refer to table eggs or shelled eggs. That is, eggs produced by domestic hens and sold in whole form to consumers for the purpose of consumption.

Food Industry: The term food industry “refers to companies that produce, process, manufacture, sell, and serve foods, beverages, and dietary supplements” (Nestle, 2003:11).

Free-Range: Eggs labelled free-range are supposed to come from chickens with some access to the outside or out-of-doors. There are no requirements for nests or perches or specifications for the total number of chickens in the outdoor environment. In British Columbia, there is a free-range label managed by the BC Egg Marketing Board.

Free-Run: The BC Egg Marketing Board has a free-run label. Eggs labelled free-run come from layers who are kept indoors in large barns. They have no access to the outdoors. Again, the standards say nothing about perches, scratching or dust bath areas or overcrowding.

Food Security: Food security is a popular concept and has been used to refer to a variety of things. It emerged as a concept in the mid-1970s at the time of global food crises. The most cited definition of food security was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1996 at the World Food Summit and has since been slightly reworked to include social access. According to FAO (2002) food security is “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2002. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001*. Rome).

Food Sovereignty: In 1996, La Via Campesina (an international organization that connects small and medium sized farmers) released a statement on People’s Food Sovereignty that declared:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes

the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.

Food sovereignty goes beyond food security. It is a holistic approach to looking at basic rights to food. It is grounded in the standpoint of the farmers. It is respectful of and promotes of indigenous rights to and uses of the land.

Food System: As Gregory et al (2005:2141) note “[t]here are several definitions of what constitutes food systems each formulated in relation to a specific range of issues (e.g. globalization of the agri-food system, Goodman 1997; community food systems, Gillespie & Gillespie 2000; ecological interests, Francis et al. 2003).” I consider food systems to encompass the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food. They encompass components of: “(i) food availability (with elements related to production, distribution and exchange); (ii) food access (with elements related to affordability, allocation and preference) and (iii) food utilization (with elements related to nutritional value, social value and food safety” (Gregory et al 2005:2141).

Organic: Organic generally refers to agriculture that is part of an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. Organic Agriculture uses minimal off-farm inputs and applies management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony. In British Columbia, organic eggs must come from hens that are fed a diet free of any animal proteins, genetically modified organisms or antibiotics. The hens cannot be sprayed with pesticides and they must each be given more than two feet square of barn space. They must spend a minimum of six hours a day grazing outside. The Canadian National Standards require that layers be organic from second day of life. COABC standards include a ninety day cleansing period for layers to convert from non-organic to organic.

Quota: In Canada eggs are regulated by a supply management scheme. As a result, with reference to eggs, quota translates simply into the number of layers a producer is allowed to own. In BC, producers with 99 or fewer layers are automatically exempt from the quota system. This number differs by province. Producers with fewer than four hundred layers can apply to the BC Egg Marketing Board for an exemption, which allow them to keep more than ninety-nine layers without having to own quota.

Regulatory Food Regime: The term “regulatory food regime” is one that I have developed inline with D. Smith’s (1999) notion of ruling relations, which I expand on later in this thesis. By ruling relations I mean the web of state, corporate, professional and bureaucratic agencies through which ruling comes to be organized (Frampton *et al.* 2006:37). Ruling relations organize society in “abstraction from local settings, extra-locally, and its textually-mediated character is essential and characteristic” (Smith 1999:49). It is by way of relations of ruling that individuals become objectified by institutional discourses that have their inauguration in texts. Building on the idea of ruling relations, but shifting the focus to food and agriculture, I conceptualize a regulatory food regime to be a specified form of the “internally coordinated complex of administrative, managerial, professional, and discursive organization that regulate, organize, govern, and

otherwise control our societies” (Smith 1999:49). This regime is a network of ruling institutions that includes agribusiness, governments and agencies who mediate the work of farmers in Canada. With respect to eggs, this includes but is not limited to the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, the BC Egg Producers, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the local health authorities and Provincial Ministries of Health and Agriculture and Lands. The regulatory food regime is very much implicated in the hegemonic neoliberal arrangement.

Small-scale: Small-scale agriculture is very hard to define. Some will define a small farm as any farm below the industry average while others qualify small-farms as those under a certain acreage. I relied on the individual farmer’s self-assessment when attributing the term to their farming practice.

Supply Management: Supply Management has its roots in cooperative farming and farmers’ struggles. Today, Canada’s supply management scheme is designed to control the supply of commodities through a system of regulated domestic production and border controls. This system also manages price, providing producers and consumers with more competitive prices.

Sustainable Agriculture: Sustainable agriculture is an umbrella term for non-conventional forms of agriculture that do not deplete the land or the people (Henderson 2000:177, see also Wendell Berry 1977, 1981), when applied to the global north. In the global south, the term has more emphasis on social and economic equity. Sustainable agriculture in this thesis is understood to be agriculture that is taken up in opposition to conventional agriculture.

Unregistered: Unregistered egg producers are individuals who own layers but do not have quota. In British Columbia, anyone with under ninety-nine layers is exempt from holding quota and is considered unregistered as is anyone with more that ninety-nine layers who has chosen not to apply for quota.³⁷

³⁷ Note that this later option is illegal.

Appendix B: Article XI of the GATT

Article XI of the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT) states (my emphasis):

1. No **prohibitions or restrictions** other than duties, taxes or other charges, whether made **effective through quotas**, import or export licenses or other measures, shall be instituted or maintained by any contracting party on the importation of any product of the territory of any other contracting party or on the exportation or sale **for export of any product destined for the territory of any other contracting party.**
2. **The provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article shall not extend to the following:**
 - (a) Export prohibitions or restrictions temporarily applied to prevent or relieve critical shortages of foodstuffs or other products essential to the exporting contracting party;
 - (b) Import and export prohibitions necessary to the application of standards or regulations for the classification, grading or marketing of commodities in international trade;
 - (c) **Import restrictions on any agricultural or fisheries product imported in any form necessary to the enforcement of government measures which operate:**
 - i. **to restrict the quantities of the like domestic product permitted to be marketed or produced, or, if there is no domestic production of the like product, for which the imported product can be directly substituted;** or
 - ii. to remove a temporary surplus of the like domestic product, or, if there is no substantial domestic production of the like product, of a domestic product for which the imported product can be directly substituted by making the surplus available to certain groups of domestic consumers free of charge or at prices below the current market level; or
 - iii. to restrict the quantities permitted to be produced of any animal product the production of which is directly dependent, wholly or mainly, on the imported commodity, if the domestic production of that commodity is relatively negligible.

On September 9th, 1975, the Government of the United States requested a meeting of the GATT Council of Representatives be held to establish a working party to make an advisory ruling on the consistency of Canada's import quotas on eggs under Article XI. The U.S. Government set out three questions to be addressed in an advisory ruling:

- 1) Does the Canadian supply management system on eggs conform to the requirements of GATT Article XI?
- 2) If the basis for determining the import quotas in accord with the requirements of the last paragraph of Article XI?
- 3) Irrespective of findings of questions 1 and 2 above, does the imposition of the Canadian quotas under Article XI constitute a nullification and impairment of a prior binding?

On February 17th, 1976, the working party (except for the U.S. member) on "Canadian Import Quota on Eggs" agreed that the operation of the Canadian supply management

program for eggs conformed to the requirements of Article XI:2(c)(i). The working group did not come to a conclusion on the last two questions. Canada won. Through the establishment of CEMA, the Government of Canada had created a legal way of restricting imports. That same year, the Federal/Provincial Agreement for the Marketing of Eggs was revised. According to the Department of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (1999:10) “[t]he Agreement is a contract which sets down provisions for the coordination of a national orderly marketing system through a system on national and provincial regulations and production quotas.”

Appendix C: Players in the BC Egg Industry

Player	Main Function
<p>BC Egg Marketing Board/ BC Egg Producers They have the responsibility to allocate quota to individual producers and ensure compliance, establish minimum producer prices, as well as collect levies to finance operations.</p>	Supply and marketing
<p>Canadian Egg Marketing Board Their role is to manage the orderly marketing of table eggs also involved with market research, producer health and quality programs. They also undertake market research and research and to collect levies to finance operations.</p>	Supply and marketing
<p>Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors' Council Their mandate is to serve members' best interests in the maintenance and development of the industry via ongoing and new activities and negotiations with other stakeholders and government</p>	Lobby
<p>National Farm Products Council They oversee all supply managed agencies. Their duties, all outlined in the <i>Farm Products Agencies Act</i> are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) advise minister on all matters related to agencies, 2) monitor operations of the agencies, 3) work with agencies and provincial government to promote more effective marketing of eggs in interprovincial and export trade, 	Supply, marketing and trade
<p>Provincial commissions, boards, councils In BC this is the Farm Industry Review Board (FIRB). Their mandate is to mediate disputes between parties affected by the marketing boards decisions.</p>	Dispute resolution
<p>Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade DEFAIT determines import quotas in partnership with the industry review boards. They are responsible for enforcing the Export and Import Permits Act.</p>	Export and import
<p>Canadian Food Inspection Agency Their mandated is to inspect and grade eggs through the administering of three acts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Canada Agricultural Products Act 2) Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act 3) Health of Animals Act 	Inspect and grade eggs, enforce acts (note that the CFIA represents trade interests of farmers as well as food safety interests at international economic negotiations)
<p>Market and Industry Services Branch of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada They are mandated is to improve and secure market access to enable the agri-food sectors to capture opportunities for trade in domestic and export markets.</p>	Market access
<p>Revenue Canada Revenue Canada is responsible for the administration of the federal tax, tariff and trade laws.</p>	Taxes, tariffs and trade laws
<p>Statistics Canada Statistics Canada compiles data relevant to the egg industry.</p>	Data compilation (data used in trade negotiations, amongst other uses)

Appendix D: The struggle over organic eggs in BC

For almost two decades the BC Association for Regenerative Agriculture (BCARA) and the Coalition of Organic Association of BC (COABC) have been trying to establish alternative marketing schemes for organic eggs. In 1991, the BCARA approached the BC Egg Marketing Board (BCEMB) to develop organic standards for egg producers. The BCEMB declined the offer. In 1994 Rabbit River Farms in Richmond, BC began producing and marketing organic eggs. They built a federally inspected egg grading station that grades and packs exclusively BC organic and free range eggs grown on small farms. In 1998, the BCEMB issued a seizure notice on Rabbit River Farms for operating without a quota. At this time, other marketing boards took action against organic mushroom and turkey producers. In response, a group called Organic Friends of the Future formed and began a campaign to express their anger by undertaking a letter writing campaign. The Ministry of Agriculture responded by requesting a meeting with organic producers and the Marketing boards. In 1999, the BC government requests negotiations between COABC and the BCEMB under the premise that if the board does not market organic eggs then do they have the right to restrict Rabbit River Farm's sales? COABC organized a committee to negotiate with all marketing boards but the negotiations failed and the Egg Board and the organic farmers were forced into mediation.

In 2000, Olera Farms, which began producing organic table eggs in 1996, began marketing to mainstream retail outlets such as IGA and SuperValu. At this time, the Province funded the mediation between the Egg Marketing Board and organic producers. It was determined that is no conclusion was reached an arbitrated decision would be made. The mediation did fail and two solutions were proposed and included a phase-in approach of organics into the marketing scheme as the organic sector grew. The organic sector requested outright exemption from the Marketing Boards. In contrast, the BCEMB declared that there was no distinction between an organic egg and a conventional egg. The government presented two proposals to the two parties and the Marketing boards rejected both. At this time, the BCEMB decided to certify seven thousand organic laying birds from within their system. They also sent out a press release proclaiming that organic eggs from Olera Farms were responsible for flooding the market.

In 2001, the COABC issued a request to the Ministry of Agriculture to select a proposal as the Ministry has power through an order in council to rule over the Marketing Boards. Ed Conroy, the Minister at the time refused. At this time the BCEMB announced a Temporary Restricted License Quota (TRLQ) as a way of usurping control over the organic egg industry. That November, a public petition requesting a separation between organic egg producers and the BCEMB, with over seven thousand signatures, was presented to the newly elected Liberal government. The government never acknowledge receiving the petition. This same year, Rabbit River Farms was the recipient of the Ethics in Action Award for corporate and social responsibility.

In 2002, the government responded to public pressure and organized another mediation session. After the mediation process the BCEMB fined Fred Reid and Olera Farms \$73,000 in back levies for selling eggs outside of the regulated marketing system. Olera Farms launched an appeal to the BC Marketing Boards arguing that no fines should have to be paid during the time that organic producers were in negotiations with the

board. The BC Marketing Board ruled in favour of the BCEMB and Olera Farms appealed the decision.³⁸ That same year COABC launched a class action lawsuit against the Egg Marketing Board on behalf of COABC organic egg producers, claiming that the Marketing Board has acted in bad faith.

In 2003, the BCEMB sought an injunction that would require Olera Farms to join the marketing board and won. Olera Farms was forced into the Marketing Board and made to pay fines exceeding \$93,000. This effectively put Olera out of business as of November 1, 2003 and forced then to collect levies from other organic producers who had used the Olera grading station. In a heartfelt letter dated November 25, 2003, posted on organics.bc.ca, Fred Reid wrote:

A recent court order has required Olera Farms to comply with all British Columbia Egg Marketing Board rules and regulations. It has been a long and draining fight to try and maintain independence for the organic movement. Olera Farms devoted all its resources to this fight and it has personally drained me financially and emotionally. We did so many things throughout the fight. A petition of support for an independent organic industry raised 7000 signatures in 2 months. A letter writing campaign to the Ministry of Agriculture resulted in over 60 communications a day. I thank the consumer support for both these initiatives but at the end of each we were mandated to talk with the marketing boards and no change resulted. I cannot think of what more Olera Farms and those that supported us could have done. Thank you once again.

Sadly I must announce the immediate closure of the certified organic egg grading business of Olera Farms. I will maintain the sale of frozen raspberries and vegetables and hope to be able to continue with organic production on our farm. I regret the loss of chickens ranging freely in my raspberries and await the full force of the egg board as they send in auditors from Deloitte and Touch to assess the full penalty I must pay for daring to develop a form of production that has hens eating healthy food and ranging freely. This same egg industry is presently resisting the pressure from consumer groups to increase the space given to caged layers from 43 square inches to 67 square inches. The paper this letter is written on is 93.5 square inches.

Effective immediately (November 1, 2003) Olera Farms will not be purchasing or selling organic eggs. I am sorry for the inconvenience to my customers; however, I just cannot carry on.

In spite of my inability to carry on with supplying organic eggs the issues leading to this situation remain very important to me. The laws allowing conventional agriculture to control the production of certified organic products or any other small scale niche market must be changed so that

³⁸ It is interesting to note that at the same time as Fred Reid was fighting his battle in court, Thomas Reid was facing an injunction from the Chicken Marketing Board. In this case, the judge ruled that "a chicken is a chicken." Thomas Reid Farm appealed this decision.

those that develop and serve these markets can not be put out of business as I have. Please write your MLA or the premiere on this matter.

Yours truly,

A. L. (Fred) Reid

Fred Reid provided the following rationale for not wanting to pay levies to the BCEMB:

Olera Farms has steadfastly refused to join marketing boards and pay the quota charges and levies that support cage layer production and subsidies the supply of cheap eggs for the purpose of making shampoos. I do not want to pay this levy because I cannot justify the increase in price of organic eggs for the purpose of supporting a form of agriculture that is so contrary to the principles of organic agriculture. The cost of joining the marketing board system would increase the cost of Olera Farms eggs by 95 cents/dozen. Organic eggs are already twice the price of conventional eggs the added cost of a dollar without any benefit to the organic community is totally unjustified.

At no time have the marketing boards offered to incorporate organic agriculture in a way that would also benefit organic agriculture. The marketing boards do have farms that will produce organically in one barn under the marketing board system. However these same farmers often have many other barns that still produce in a conventional way. Their other barns still have cage layers or they will still have hens fed grains that are produced with pesticides. They will still feed genetically engineered corn, soy, and canola. They will still feed animal by-products to their hens and spray the hens and barns with pesticides. Marketing boards will now say that they have organic farmers that support the marketing board system. The consumer must ask these farms how committed they are to the principles of organic and humane agriculture on all of the farms that they own. . .

In Canada the organic producer is not encouraged or rewarded by government for providing the natural and humane alternative. Instead we are penalized and taxed by the very form of agriculture that we are the alternative to. Olera Farms and the other organic farmers and organic consumers have to raise nearly half a million dollars just to fight for the right to produce in an alternative way to conventional agriculture. These same governments offer a million dollars to the BC Dairy Farmers to assist them in cleaning up the pollution that they cause. These same governments spend millions of dollars to defend the marketing board system that insists on restricting the organic market. We have appealed to government many times to no avail. Our encouragement and reward

comes from the consumer who recognizes that we do agriculture differently and that there is an increased cost of doing agriculture in this way. I have had no problem in asking the consumer to pay the added \$1.50/dozen for the cost of farming organically. I don't think that anyone in the organic community should accept the added \$1.00/dozen that would be a direct subsidy to cage layer production.

On September 1 and 2, 2005, the Farm Industry Review Board (FIRB) issued general directions on specialty production and new entrant and quota programs, to the five supply-managed commodity boards in BC. These directions followed a two year review of the supply management system by FIRB and the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MAL). The boards were required to draft new Orders that complied with FIRB's new general directions by October 31, 2005 for review and approval. The BC Egg Marketing Board requested and was granted an extension and submitted their draft amendments to their Standing Orders on December 5, 2005. The Egg Board was required to make changes and to clarify various provisions in the Orders. On April 7, 2005, the Egg Board re-submitted their draft Standing Orders that were sent out to the egg industry for comment. After two more reviews, on July 18, 2006, FIRB approved proposed Orders contingent on several factors. Notably, FIRB articulated a concern over what they perceived as an "inadequate and inequitable amount of production available to the province under the federal-provincial agreement and the resulting limits placed on all BC egg producers" (Bullock 2006, July 18: Letter to BCEMB). In this letter, Richard Bullock, Chair of FIRB, encouraged the BCEMB to "actively pursue the changes in allocation policy necessary to support the growth for all sectors of the BC industry."

Appendix E: BCEMB Criteria for Specialty Eggs

The BCEMB has set out the following criteria that must be met in order to qualify as Specialty Eggs:

"Specialty Egg" means organic egg and any other new innovative organic egg produced by holders of Specialty Layer Quota. To qualify as Specialty Eggs the following criteria must be met:

- (i) there must be third party certification i.e. - through the AFCQA and/or nationally or internationally recognized standards or other standard acceptable to FIRB.
- (ii) there is identity preservation to the consumer through product labeling and marking of the unique farm based attributes.
- (iii) there is extra farm based effort and investment to produce unique product attributes
- (iv) BCEMB auditors must be able to verify each criteria through an audit process.
- (v) Specialty eggs are to be 3rd party certified along the entire supply chain from farm to the retailer.
- (vi) the certifying body will attest to the validity of the production, processing and marketing of the specialty product attributes.
- (vii) loss of certification while in production may, subject to Board approval, result in the marketing of eggs as regular layer quota eggs for the life of that flock. (The Board expects that specialty producers will, in the event of losing certification for a flock, take all necessary steps to reestablish certification at the earliest possible date, and in any event, by the time the next flock is placed)
- (viii) if a producer loses certification for two successive flocks the Board may, at its sole discretion revoke any new entrant specialty product quota held by that producer. Revocation may result from loss of certification due to abuse of certification standards. Note: Temporary loss of certification due to uncontrollable circumstances such as having to use restricted remedies to protect the welfare of the flock (when no effective organic treatment exists) would not result in the revocation of specialty product quota.

Appendix F: Providing Context: A Short History of Farming Otherwise

Saltspring Island “*will always be remembered as absolutely the first agricultural settlement of the then Colony of Vancouver (Island).*”
Edward Mallandaine, British Columbia Directory, 1987

While Indigenous peoples have engaged in various forms of organized food production for thousands of years, it was not until the fur trade in the early 1800s that ‘agriculture,’ in its Western conventional sense, was introduced to the British Columbia landscape. Agriculture, in this sense has been practiced since the onset of the continental fur trade and expanded to Vancouver Island and the mainland of BC as they become colonies and when “a regime of private property was instituted, land policies were worked out, and Natives who had survived the epidemics were isolated on reserves (Harris & Demeritt 1997:220). The gold rush in the later half of the 1800s resulted in an increased need for agricultural production however most new immigrants opted to pan for gold rather than grow food. The Hudson’s Bay Company employees planted gardens at various outposts across the province and in 1858, the HBC helped to establish the Puget’s Sound Agricultural Company. The next year, seventeen settlers arrived on Saltspring Island and started farming.

Across BC, the onslaught of migrant workers tasked with railway construction in the late 1800s supported the development of a domestic agricultural market. At the same time, the Okanagan Valley was developing a strong fruit industry while in the Fraser Valley, dairy and vegetable production was increasing. Canadian census data show that in 1901, there were 511,100 farms across Canada. In BC, 1891 census data show that there were almost 4,500 farmers and around 8,000 people considered to be employed in

agriculture (Harris & Demeritt 1997:220). The number of farms peaked with 732,800 farms in the 1940s. By 2001, the number of Canadian farms had decreased to 246,923.

Cole Harris and David Demeritt (1997:219) note that historically, in British Columbia, farming was an immigrant activity that “placed a new regime of property on the land, as well as families that intended to stay.” “Farm landscapes,” they later continue, “were expressions of introduced cultural and ecological arrangements, and were drastic departures from indigenous pasts.”