

BUYING FOOD, BUYING AN IDEAL: THE NEW FOOD MOVEMENT IN BOSTON AREA FARMERS' MARKETS



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Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to

Sociology Department

Tufts University

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Abstract

Current sociological research on farmers' markets has focused primarily on why customers choose to shop at farmers' markets. This thesis takes a broader view, exploring farmers' markets as multi-dimensional social spaces shaped not only by food procurement needs, but by elaborate social and political meanings attached to food and to consumption itself. Using ethnographic fieldwork and 22 in-depth interviews with consumers and vendors, this research shows how these meanings are constructed and resisted collaboratively by shoppers and vendors, and the powerful ways in which they are informed by leading voices in the New Food Movement. In particular, I show that shoppers consume ideals promoted by the New Food movement, despite their perceptions of themselves as unaffiliated – and in some cases opposed – to the movement itself. Although farmers benefit from the wholesome halo afforded them by the New Food Movement, in the end, bucolic valorization comes with considerable costs in the form of unrealistic consumer expectations and pressure to somehow be above the realities of profit-based necessities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Undoubtedly the largest undertaking in my life thus far, this thesis has been a vehicle for personal and intellectual growth. Producing this document, though, would not have been possible without the help of some particularly instrumental people. For all of you who helped me, on this page and beyond, the people who encouraged me, and believed in me, thank you. I dedicate this to all of you.

I must begin with Professor Sarah Sobieraj, my thesis advisor at Tufts University, I say thank you for your incredible patience. You have challenged me and supported me, helping me achieve what I previously thought impossible. And Professor Jim Ennis, thanks for your thoughtful feedback and ideas.

Laurel Hankins, your pointed questions helped keep me on the right path, pointed in the right direction, when I needed it most. Thanks.

And to those individuals who have been supportive in other ways, thank you for making this all possible. Cole Archambault, Allister Chang, Charles Cushing, Erica Fine, Gabe Frumkin, Laura Gerhardt, and Talya Peltzman, thank you all for your help with the nuts and bolts. Thank you, also, to the Synaptic Scholars and Tufts Institute for Global Leadership Director, Sherman Teichman.

Dean Reitman, thanks for believing in me, and for pushing me to take on this project.

Finally, I must thank my parents, Jay and Barbara. Your financial support and unwavering encouragement have been enormously helpful. Words cannot express my appreciation.

INTRODUCTION

What picture comes to mind when you hear or read the word “farm” or “farmer”? For most people, the question conjures some combination of the following:

Black and white spotted cows.
Floppy straw hats.
Overalls.
Rolling grassy hills.
Old stone rock walls.
Big red barns.
Old farm houses.
Pig tails.
Happy families.
Leathery sun-tanned skin.

Most city-dwelling Americans imagine that this is what the land and people used to look like in this country. To whatever extent these picturesque bucolic scenes ever existed, the reality of today’s farms is very different.

In the past decade, there has been a resurgence of idealism related to farms and farmers. Evidence is found in many places: images on food packaging both in big supermarkets like Whole Foods Market (WFM) and Trader Joe’s and at smaller stores and farm stands depict quaint farm scenes. Paralleling this, farmers’ markets and roadside produce stalls have been popping up with increasing regularity. While farmers’ markets have existed in some form for decades, the surge in popularity is a new phenomenon, with the number of farmers’ markets in this country increasing by 192% in the past decade (“Farmers Market Growth: 1994-2009”).

Is the rising popularity of farmers' markets, WFM, Trader Joe's, and the various products they sell a coincidence? Or is this indicative of a true social movement? If this is a movement, what does it stand for? And against? Who are the leaders? What is it offering its participants?

One of the easiest questions to answer is who the leaders are. They include authors like Michael Pollan, Alice Waters and Carlo Petrini, farmers like Joel Salatin, and websites like the Locavores (www.locavores.com). Through writing books, traveling around on speaking tours, and hosting conferences, the unified goal is simple: get consumers to think more deeply about their food.

These leaders have articulated a clear opposition. They denigrate the agribusinesses, demonize the Centralized Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO), and decry the prevalence of high fructose corn syrup. They lament the extraordinary length of the modern food supply chain, utilizing a phenomenon known as food-miles¹, which in many cases can exceed even 1000 or 2000 miles. Leaders claim that the many Americans who are buying inexpensive food from thousands of miles away—apples from New Zealand, asparagus from Argentina, clementines from Spain—do so at a tremendous external cost to both the environment and the American social fabric.

Instead of the depersonalized and damaging food practices exposed in these mediums, the leaders advocate a return to an idealized American agriculturalism like the one depicted

¹ Food miles is a term now widely used as a metric for the distance between food origination and food destination. While its origination is debated, most credit Andrea Paxton (1994) for its creation in her report for the Sustainable Agriculture, Food, and Environment Alliance (SAFE).

in the list at the beginning of this chapter. Waters, Petrini, and Pollan stake their claim: instead of being satisfied by the mediocre produce available at the grocery store, consumers can demand more. They can visit farmers' markets and specialized supermarket chains like WFM and obtain delicious and attractive produce that is much healthier and more sustainable than the alternative available at traditional grocery stores. "Buy local and you can buy support these ideals," the authors claim.

As this thesis will reveal, the groundswell of support created for the foods advocated by these leaders constitute a bona fide social movement. There is a recent and well-organized effort to generate a sea-change in food production, distribution, and consumption methods in this country. The movement claims that any consumer can become a part of this movement by consuming carefully and thoughtfully. By considering the environmental, moral and ethical implications of every apple, piece of cheese, and piece of meat purchased and then consumed, bystanders to this movement can become mobilized and engaged participants.

I will also contend that this movement is significantly different from ones that preceded it. While it has early roots in the co-ops and Back to the Land movement of the 1970s, this movement distinguishes itself in its *unified opposition to a clearly articulated opposition*. To differentiate it from previous movements, I will henceforth refer to this new approach to food-based active consumption as "the New Food Movement."

The New Food Movement is a relatively new movement, about a decade old, with consumer activism offered as the main tool for mobilization. However, as this paper will reveal, some issues emerge with farmers' market shoppers: Consumers acknowledge the

movement's tenets, but deny any form of collective identity. How can sociology explain this phenomenon?

After defining and substantiating the existence of the New Food Movement, this piece seeks to answer two related questions: what is the impact of the movement on consumers at the farmers' market; and what is the relationship of the farmers' market consumers to the New Food Movement? This paper explores the possibility that consumers are purchasing more than simply the produce; they are consuming a romanticized farm and farmer. What does this ideal look like? Furthermore, how do the vendors, produce farmers, dairy farmers, animal farmers, and bakers grapple with the lofty and often counter-factual idealistic preconceptions that consumers bring with them to the market?

Through 22 in-depth interviews with both consumers and vendors, as well as ethnographic observations at farmers' markets, I seek to answer these questions and dig deeper than previous pieces in sociology. By also considering the other half of the equation, the farmers, I will explore and analyze how vendors manage the consumers' expectations, as well as their own desires to live up to consumer ideals, to sell produce, and to remain profitable.

Ultimately, this piece will probe into the movement-created idealism of the consumer, and the realities faced by the vendors, in a groundbreaking analysis of the farmers' market as a space. Among its other accomplishments, this paper gives the vendors a comprehensive voice for the first time in the body of sociological literature, and is a first look at the previously-unconsidered dynamic of the impact of idealism on consumer/producer relationships in a direct market setting, largely influenced by a social movement. In the end,

this paper brings to light some important questions about the body of social movement literature, proposing new concepts and models, and requiring a shift in analyses for modern, movements offering active consumption as a tactic.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING AND MAPPING THE MOVEMENT

Food and food politics-based initiatives percolate through today's media. For the first time since Upton Sinclair's book-turned-movie, *The Jungle*, published in 1906, agitators and muckrakers, in a variety of forms, are bringing the food industry's many problems to light. These initiatives offer many different messages, but at the most fundamental level, attempt to actualize the same ideal: encourage customers to make the "right" decisions and buy the "right" products ² (Micheletti 2003; Harrison, Newholm and Shaw 2005). Recently, authors have been churning out books to help conscious consumers make these decisions. Titles include *Fast Food Nation*, *Slow Food Nation*, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, *What to Eat*, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, and *Omnivore's Dilemma*. These impassioned critiques challenge the current food procurement system on a holistic scale, from production to consumption (Jasper 1997).

Food, Inc. brought to the silver screen visceral images of tens of thousands of animals crammed into tiny pens. Online, the website of the San Francisco-based group known as the Locavores (www.locavores.com) is full of information for and about individuals who are participating in the so-called 100-mile diet, only eating food grown within 100 miles of the Bay

² While taken for granted today, the idea of "rightness" playing a role in our society at all departs from the future predicted by Max Weber (1954). Whereas he forecasted the domination of society by an "iron cage" — bureaucracy—in fact, the opposite has transpired. In this aspect of society, consumption by those with the means to decide what to purchase, moral values and control has increased. Consumers have a huge amount of personal freedom and autonomy to purchase the products that align with their values.

area. In 2007, the word “locavore” was added to the Oxford American Dictionary and labeled Word of the Year. In the news, there is continued coverage of stories like the school lunch protests, during which more than 20,000 children and adults mobilized to spread awareness of issues surrounding childhood malnutrition and diabetes (Yeoman 2003).

This is part of a new movement, a movement which encourages individuals to spend more time learning, reading, and thinking about the implications of what they eat and then demand a shorter food supply chain. The amount of information related to this topic has been growing exponentially, as has group membership and adherence on every scale—from formal national and international groups, to smaller-scale, more informal local groups (Kleiman 2009). This is the New Food Movement: a collection of seemingly disparate initiatives that are altering the way consumers think about, shop for, and eat food, inciting them to push back against globalization and the estranging food procurement systems in the U.S. This movement is influencing the consumer/producer landscape, from the range and type of products offered to the interpersonal buying/selling experience. As the movement gains traction, customers are asking different questions and placing greater demands on their vendors. Analyzing the landscape of consumer activism and its associated research, by utilizing a multi-dimensional movement-based framework, this chapter will elucidate the themes crosscutting the landscape of the New Food Movement. This piece will employ histories of consumer activism, as well as the history of the connection between food and identity, to analyze and map the New Food Movement, shedding light on the shopping experience at the farmers’ markets for both consumers and producers.

The Increasing Politicization of Consumption

Today's food-focused, active consumerism has a clear lineage rooted in the history of consumerist discourse. In their seminal piece on consumerism, Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Maguire (2004) summarized modern consumerism. And while some academics have explored connections between consumption centuries ago, as far back as the Revolutionary War (Breen 2004), this type of consumption was categorically different, a reflection of the significant shifts that have occurred in our post-industrial, post-materialist world. Zukin and Maguire saw the beginnings of consumption studies as simplistic studies of buying, in contrast to the ideas of Braudel (1967)³. Marx described consumption as a so-called "animal function," which was closely related to Weber's focus on the "instrumentality" of consuming. Both theorists failed to recognize the depth and meaning ascribed to goods and buying. Simmel's studies of consumerism in the late 19th and early 20th century opened a new chapter. Simmel's theories on "sensuality and attraction novelty" were the first to recognize the existence of and explore the emotional substrate undergirding consumption decisions (Zukin and Maguire 2004: 174). Marx, Simmel, and Weber set the stage for the greater depth that 20th century scholars have achieved.

Today, the concept of consumer *activism*, a phenomenon which first appeared in the mid 1800s, has become increasingly important in praxis as well as theory (Lang and Gabriel

³ In Braudel's paradigmatic piece on capitalism, he argued that the history of so-called "material life" and "economic life" were enormously variable, across times and places, and could not be generalized. Instead of viewing the past retrospectively as a simple time, in comparison to today, he contextualized his work to a greater extent in the time, recognizing the inherent challenges imposed by the time, instead of applying today's logic, anachronistically, in historical considerations.

2005). The active consumerism that we see today originated in political consumerism. Michele Micheletti (2003) defines consumer activism as “making choices based on a variety of factors, including fairness, justice, values and an ethical and/or political assessment.” Such activism can be individual or collective (Micheletti 2003: 2). While this definition may seem broad, the frequency with which today’s innumerable and varied social movements tactically employ consumer activism, as well as its utility in mobilizing supporters, necessitates such breadth. Today’s consumers can buy things to make political *and* social statements, in support of either political or apolitical initiatives and ideals. These statements are often articulated by select groups within society, and are then followed by larger populations. With his relatively recent book, David Brooks argues the bobos, or bourgeois bohemians “define our age” (Brooks 2001: 10). And while the bobos do play a role in shaping the landscape for the active consumers, as he found in his analysis of rural suburban Pennsylvania (Brooks 2001: 55-60)⁴, the sphere of active consumerism expands beyond the reach of the bobos. While Brooks thought the bobos had enormous power, Zukin and Maguire found that all consumers are intoxicated and overwhelmed by the freedom to define their identity with their consumption choices. This responsibility is creating a “crisis of identity” for many consumers (Zukin and Maguire 2004: 181). Issues surrounding taste and lifestyle merge with consumer tendency to “[classify] products as more or less desirable, acceptable, or valuable” (*ibid.*: 181). This classification can best be explained as a symbolic language. This is the

⁴ In his chapter on consumption, Brooks studied Wayne Pennsylvania. His observations revealed that the bobos changed the town forever. When they arrived, they brought independent bookstores, Parisian-style coffee shops, and gourmet bread companies, driving out the WASP identity which previously defined the town.

language of consumer activism. Fully appreciating today's politicization of consumption requires a foundation in the roots of consumer activism.

To understand the complicated history of consumption, scholars employ a few different frameworks; the most helpful parse the history into easily understandable eras. While many conceptualize the history as linear, examples include Micheletti (2003) and Vogel (2004), Gabriel and Lang (2005) subdivide the history into four waves. While Vogel elucidates more recent historical events, his history concentrates on America, limiting broader understanding. This account will employ Lang and Gabriel's framework; differentiating between the waves parses the history into more easily understandable sections, increasing facileness of comparisons between trends today and throughout history. Lang and Gabriel's framework represents each wave of active consumerism not merely as an isolated era, but as an important thread in the complicated weave that is today's consumer activism. The four waves are (1) Co-Operative Consumers, (2) Value for Money Consumers, (3) Naderism and (4) Alternative Consumers. The unifying theme across all the waves has always been about the bifurcation of the "high-road" and the "low-road," providing an answer to the question of "which products *should* I buy?" This history will trace these four waves, injecting ideas from other scholars to deepen understanding.

Although the first wave (1), Co-Operative Consumers, originated more than a century ago, some aspects of this wave remain evident today. The wave began in Rochdale, Northwest England in the mid 1800s. In response to local monopolies who "had conspired to supply that most basic of commodities, bread, at very high prices" (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 41), citizens opened up co-operative grain mills. In the 1800s, consumers sought to shrink the

widening gap between consumers and producers, making it even disappear for some.

Consumers wanted to produce their own goods. Doing so offered a “richer, more fulfilled social existence, a chance for working people to build a better world” (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 41). The goal at the beginning of the wave exhibits remarkable similarities to what we see today, when 700 million people are involved in some sort of co-op, across 100 countries (*ibid.*: 42). As Lang and Gabriel recognize (2005), the Co-Operative Consumers movement formed the roots of the more modern “back to the land movement” of the 1970s (Obach 2007), which will be discussed later. The same can be said of today’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and the trend of increasing direct consumer/producer relationships (Hinrichs 2000; Parkins and Craig 2009).

In the second wave (2), the Value for Money Consumers perpetuated fears of monopolization and concentration; their narrow-minded, value-based goals are leading to this wave’s downfall (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 43). Nava (1991) explains that the 1950s and 1960s were full of elitist consumerist-challengers who felt that consumers were “easily duped by advertisers and politically pacified by the buying of useless objects” (*ibid.*: 162). While these challengers commanded only a minority status, they contributed to a broader fear, which led to the formation of Consumer Reports and numerous other magazines in Europe, including *Which?*, a magazine of the UK Consumers’ Association. Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) began the food-based branch of this wave, as it increased awareness and radically changed food policy during a time when most Americans took food safety for granted. Across all branches of this wave, individuals focused on societal changes; adherents perceived their role as “ameliorative, to make the market-place more efficient and to champion the interests

of the consumer within it” (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 45). The wave had a simple idea: increase the value of all of the products. Today, with newer themes in consumerism, this wave is receiving challenges. Proponents are construed as having corrupt, narrow ideals: too great of a focus on increasing standards of living, an overly middle-class centric population of supporters, and a disregard for poorer consumers (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 45). With these challenges paralyzing this wave, it seems to be nearing its omega. And while worries about monopolies persist today, worries about value exist alongside concerns surrounding over-manipulation, health, and sustainability (Raynolds 2000; Petrini 2005; Pollan 2006, 2008).

In the middle of the 20th century, Ralph Nader spearheaded the third wave of consumer activism, known as Naderism (3). Naderism introduced the idea of increased consumer responsibility while underscoring the importance of consumers challenging big corporations. This new emphasis on consumer responsibility was in response to companies wielding increasing power over consumers with their targeted advertisements and aggressive marketing, problems which remain today (Schor 2004). This wave was populated by organizations with relatively uniform goals: “a distrust of corporations, a defense of the individual against the giants, a demand that the state protect its citizens, and above all, an appeal for Americans to be citizens, not just consumers” (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 46). Here, with the word “citizen” entering the discussion, we see the infancy of today’s popular offer by many companies: companies can offer consumers a bridging of the citizen-consumer gap, all with one purchase (Johnston 2007). Nader’s movement superseded previous emphases on value by empowering consumers to challenge the market itself and cease their unchecked faith. For the first time, consumer activists were entrusted with a responsibility: confront,

expose, stand-up for public rights (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 47). This responsibility increased in depth and breadth: “Nader’s views have fed on the deep apprehension of American consumers, and the public in general, towards anything big and unfettered, corporate power in particular” (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 48). Many of today’s various types of consumer activism have strong roots in Naderism. As Harold’s book (2007) underscores, concurrent with Nader’s efforts, magazines like *Adbusters* and groups like *The Yes Men* emerged, hijacking, pirating, and sabotaging the carefully crafted identities of the big corporate power discussed by Nader. They pushed back against overconsumption and advocated for decreased consumption and increased awareness (Harold 2007).

The green movement marshaled the Alternative Consumers who make up the most recent wave. This wave introduced environmental considerations and further increased awareness and responsibility by accentuating the idea of ethics. Beginning in the 1970s, the movement was inchoate until the 1980s, when it accelerated rapidly, fully coming into its own in the early 1990s. With its presence increasing, consumers began to worry about the implications of their consumption patterns on future generations: “buy this rather than that product and you can help ‘good’ producers to out-compete ‘bad’ producers” (Lang and Gabriel 2005: 49). Consumers began to worry about CFCs and pesticides. The message was clear: “consume carefully” (*ibid.*: 49). Surprisingly absent were the anti-consumption ideals of the 1970s. As the green movement picked up steam, power shifted into the hands of the collective consumers and companies were forced to listen. While ethics had been part of the picture for decades, Gabriel and Lang remark that the fourth wave’s conjunction of ethics with all of the previous issues—the environment, value, and quality—was a new phenomenon

(Lang and Gabriel 2006: 166). Ethical consumption was realized under the thought that every purchase equaled a vote; “vote with your dollar” became a unifying slogan (Dickinson and Carsky 2005).

Beyond the Four Waves of Consumption

In bringing these ideas, the environment, ethics, and social responsibility, into the limelight, the alternative consumers reshaped sociality by giving greater power to consumers. Consumers began to develop a sense of shared identity as consumption decisions became increasingly public. Zukin and Maguire (2004) went so far as to claim that desires for goods were *entirely* socially constructed. While this statement might sound rather hyperbolic, consumer culture offered a language for consumers to communicate and think about their needs. Producers attempted to speak in this language, indicating their ethical mindfulness with their advertisements and product presentations and by discussing their green and socially responsible initiatives (Barnett, et al. 2005). Micheletti (2003) discussed the phenomenon known as greenwashing, whereby companies shroud their misdeeds under a cloak of environmentally-considerate actions. Today’s consumer activists want to break through these cloaks by making careful decisions that reflect consideration for others. This is known as moral selving (Barnett, et al. 2005: 30). The sellers facilitate this moral selving by turning oughts into cans; by purchasing their products consumers are able to make decisions that will lead to their idealized virtuous existence (*ibid.*: 31). Barnett, et al. elaborate on moral selving through their use of Goffman-esque imagery in their argument about the

performative nature of consumption. The newly performative consumption practices are why places like WFM, farmers' markets, and CSAs have become increasingly social places. Sellers want to communicate clear messages and consumers want their choices to be witnessed and recognized—a perfect solution emerges with farmers' markets offering music, and Whole Foods offering Wi-Fi and places to sit and relax.

Beyond the social effect, the Alternative Consumer wave has had political effects as well, introducing the idea of an *economic* vote. The conceptualization of buying as constituting an economic vote increases sense of participation in societies (Dickinson and Carsky 2005). While hardly a vote in the political sense, this form of economic “voting” bestows on consumers feelings of political participation by connecting consuming to political activities like campaigning: “Ordinary, political, moral dispositions of everyday consumption are re-articulated by policy-makers, campaign organizations, and businesses” (Barnett, et al. 2005: 29). Barnett, et al. continue this line of thinking, discussing the significance of the results of this re-articulation: these consumers feel more involved and find themselves more trusting, overall. Consumers feel that purchases help them articulate their desires. As their desires morph, their consumptions patterns follow. The voting makes individual actions more collective, uniting the seemingly irreconcilable public and private virtues (Micheletti 2003: 154). This new sense of involvement creates a rather large problem: where is all of the information for what to buy going to come from? How can consumers remain informed?

Advocacy organizations play an integral role in keeping consumers informed. A large variety of initiatives spread information about ethical consumption through virtual, physical, and social space, inserting this information into public and political agendas. These messages

are dispersed by organizations like Greenpeace, Slow Food International, and the Organic Consumers Association. Magazines like *Vegetarian Times* and *Organic Gardening*, *The New York Times* and its magazine, as well as *The New Yorker*, at times, print the messages, too. Online, information comes from forums like agbioforum.com and websites like Local Harvest (www.localharvest.com). Locavore offshoots in cities across America invite interested individuals to join their elists. A visit to any grocery store elucidates that there are also more formal product labels like Fair Trade, organic, and the relatively new, unofficial label that some companies have taken to, non-GMO, which stands for not a genetically modified organism. It is through all of these avenues that information is communicated to consumers, teaching them which items deserve their vote, or their dollar.

The four waves of consumer activism offer a useful tool in understanding the history of consumption. They showcase the trajectory of increasing responsibility, with today's environmentally-conscious, ethically-minded consumer activists at the apogee. But sociologically dissecting food consumption and consumer/producer relationships requires a multi-directional analysis. Paralleling the timeline of consumer activism as a whole, the relationship between humans and food has also developed along its own timeline.

Food and Identity

Food is a product that has historically been especially closely linked to identity. In our post-materialist, postmodern society, a large subsection of the population worries about its identity, self-expression, and lifestyle, instead of basic necessities (Ingelhart 1997). While

food's employment as an indicator of location within social hierarchy is far from new (Gusfield 199: 79), the fact that today's food can communicate a consumer's education, awareness, selflessness, consideration, and environmental friendliness is a new development.

The role that food plays and the messages it communicates have changed over the centuries. In his piece on the metaphors of food, Joseph Gusfield (1992) argues that the roots of today's food movements can be traced back to the Natural Foods Movements of the 1830s. While he says "today," his piece was published in the early 1990s. The movement of the 1990s is distinct from today's movement, as will be proven in the next section. Gusfield examined the response of many religious zealots during the 1830s to urbanization and the increasing prevalence of sexuality and alcoholism. These zealots advocated for self-discipline by connecting abstinence from sex, alcoholism, and food excess to morality.

A century later, the 1950s brought the advent of another natural foods movement. This time, the movement advocated for the importance of "health food" or "natural food." The results were increased localization, diversity of spices and flavors, and smaller distribution networks and economies. Movement adherents demonized food preservation, citing its relationship with illness and overall mental and physical well-being. Gusfield (1992) quoted Warren Belasco, who explained the attitude of the time: "whatever transforms food from its 'natural' state is harmful (Gusfield 1992: 94). The roots of Belasco's *countercuisine* idea emerged from the valuation placed on "natural" and "healthy" (Belasco 1989). Also paralleling this movement was a campaign mounted against DDT which had been so prevalent in the years before (Tannahill 1988: 339). At this point, convenience foods, with their numerous additives, or "adulterants" as Tannahill calls them, became anathema

(Tannahill 1988: 349). Despite the continued domination of convenience foods in the overall market, efforts against them gained considerable momentum with a sizable percentage of the population (Tillotson 2003).

Close behind the beginning of the 1950s natural foods movement, riding its wave of popularity, was the cooperative movement, offering a way to purchase products in a more responsible, satisfying, and informative manner. Surprisingly, many pieces on the history of food in this country fail to address cooperatives with any depth. One of the only scholars to do so is Belasco, with his exploration into the idea of countercuisine. While cooperatives have been around for centuries, the co-ops of the 1970s were different. These so-called new-wave co-ops offered healthy food at low prices, instead of the unhealthy food at cheap prices offered by the older co-ops, and the healthy food at high prices offered by the natural food stores. Co-ops embodied the ideals typified by the co-operative consumer wave, but offered “advice, [and] moral support” in addition to healthy food (Belasco 87). They were also information outposts, satisfying two broader needs: “to find nonprofit food sources and to fight corporate capitalism in quiet, nonviolent ways” (*ibid.*: 89). At their most basic level, they offered a closer connection to the earth, the very connection large, chain supermarkets had destroyed. Their products included “brown rice, whole grain breads, herbal teas, and soy products, all of which could be purchased in bulk...the staples of the countercuisine” (*ibid.*: 89). And as food prices rose, the popularity of co-ops surged, extending from the decidedly hip areas to the realms of the working-class. The biggest complaint they received, though, was that they were expensive, lacking the buying power of large companies like Safeway. In the mid 1970s, the old adage of the food industry proved true: “the big got bigger, the small

got out” (*ibid.*: 90). Many of the co-ops started disappearing. The larger, more successful ones expanded, forced to imitate the very businesses they were opposing.

Another movement, less faddish but also less widespread, was the vegetarian movement. While the vegetarian movement has spanned centuries, its popularity surged in the later part of the 20th century. While today, vegetarians make up around 5% of the U.S. population (Paumgarten 2009), the first mentions of vegetarianism are found in Buddhist texts as well as in the writings of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras. Modern vegetarianism, though, as it pertains to identity, can be traced back to Romanticism in the 18th century. For the Romantics, eating defined character, and a vegetarian was a person of better character. At that time, many individuals associated omnivorous diets with robbery, sycophancy and tyranny (Fernandez-Armesto 2002: 43). Morality entered the picture formally with Sylvester Graham in the 1830s; he claimed that “flesh eaters were ‘despotic, vehement and impatient’” (Graham qtd. in Fernandez-Armesto 2002: 43).

With proponents like Frances Moore Lappé, vegetarianism became popular again in the 1970s (*ibid.*: 43). Lappé’s book, *Diet for a Small Planet*, has sold 3 million copies since being published in 1971 (“Small Planet Team”). Lappé’s claims centered around environmental concerns; instead of any inherent issue with eating flesh, she decried the environmental impact of the way that livestock was raised. Others, like Ita Jones, discussed the “alienation from death itself,” and identified a decreasing respect for life as a problem caused by the meat distribution system. Overall, the appeal of this vegetarian movement was in the shared idea that diet was “a way to overcome personal alienation, and to take social responsibility” (Belasco 1989: 60). The emphasis on social responsibility has many similarities

to the vegetarian movement we see today. While explaining the movement, Belasco and Fernandez-Armesto also discuss the reasons why the movement never really gained any serious traction. Belasco weighs the possibility of boring recipes in the cookbooks, while Fernandez-Armesto suggests that the very ideals that inspired the movement eventually led to its downfall--the idealized holistic purity across all facets of life that the movement demanded was too challenging to maintain. Despite the movement's small following, vegetarianism and its associated lifestyle did offer many people a rewarding identity and lifestyle with which to experiment.

Of course, no analysis on food would be complete without a mention of Bourdieu's pioneering work on the efforts by the rich to distinguish themselves. In the 1970s, Bourdieu examined the role of food as a way of signaling, a method similar to the vegetarian movement, but with a more varied message. Bourdieu noticed that in France, in the early 1970s, the wealthy people wanted to distinguish themselves with their food. They preferred rare, exotic items. They also exhibited preferences for lighter foods as a way of communicating their wealth; these consumers had so much money that they could afford to spend more on less. They preferred foods that were "tasty, health-giving, light and not fattening" (Bourdieu 1984: 190). Bourdieu was one of the first to remark that "the body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of the 'person,' is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of innermost nature" (Bourdieu 1984: 192). That is, when they have the means, people make their food decisions very carefully, as a way of communicating their identity. There are many surprising analogues between Bourdieu's work and today's population, four decades later.

The New Food Movement

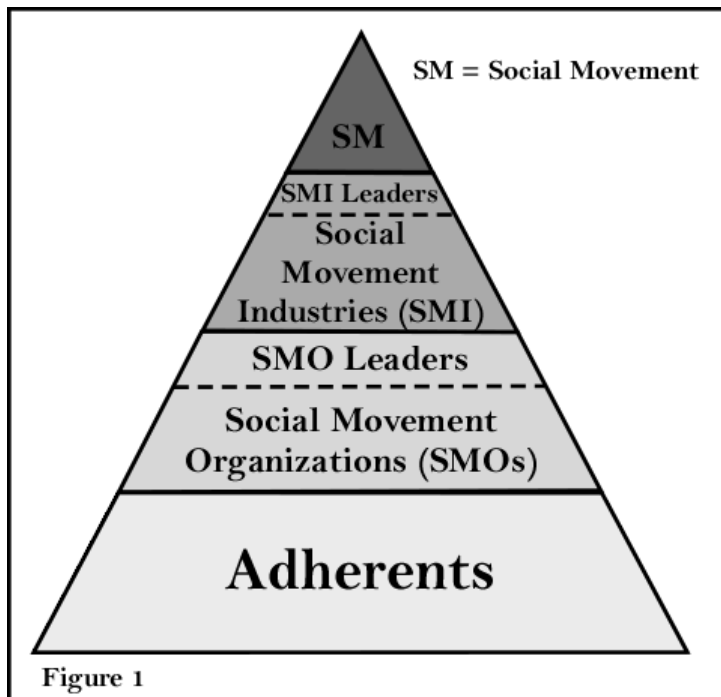
I choose the moniker “New Food Movement” carefully, fully recognizing the barrage of challenges and questions it provokes. For movement scholars, the label New Food Movement will conjure questions about the shape of the movement: who are the movement leaders? Where is the unity? What are the ideals? Food-specialists might argue that these initiatives are too splayed to be a movement. Historians might counter that these initiatives, whatever they are, are far from new, and are rooted in movements that began 150 years ago. In fact, the movement has unified in the last decade under clear leaders and has gained mounting support for efforts challenging food production, distribution, and consumption methods.

Movement definitions evolve and change, with many authors making slight alterations to those which came before them. A review of the academic work reveals two authoritative compendia: Snow, et al.’s *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2007), and Goodwin and Jasper’s *Social Movements Reader*, 2nd edition (2009). Snow, et al.’s broad, relatively inclusive definition utilizes five simple characteristics—collectivities, organization, continuity, and challenging or defending an authority, which could be either an institution or a culture (Snow, et al. 2007: 11). Goodwin and Jasper have a similar definition: “a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper 2009: 4). For the purposes of this analysis, I will hybridize the definitions: a social movement is a collective and sustained noninstitutional challenge to or defense of authority, cultural beliefs, or practices with some degree of organization. The following analysis will employ this definition to map the movement.

A Pyramid Model to Understand the New Food Movement

To map the organization of the New Food Movement, I develop and employ a new model of conceptualizing social movements: a four-level pyramid. While a similar four-level model was previously developed by Ennis and Schreuer (1987), their framework delineates a hierarchy of movement commitment. Their conceptualization of “adherents,” “supporters,” “members,” and “leaders” organizes participants into decreasing levels of involvement. The utility of their pyramid was in that it offered a visual delineation of movement engagement and commitment.

The pyramid metaphor that I outline focuses on the varying scale, from individuals to large organizations, that comprise the movement as a whole (See Figure 1, below). At the bottom of the pyramid (level 1) are the individual adherents, making up an enormously wide base. The next level (2) is full of social movement organizations (SMOs): organizations working towards one or more movement goals. Most large social movements, especially national or transnational movements, have from dozens to hundreds of SMOs. Sitting at the top of level 2 are the figureheads supporting level 3; they are the leaders of the SMOs. The next level (3) is populated by social movement industries (SMIs). The SMIs are groupings of SMOs with like-minded goals. Every SMO fits under an SMI, and while some SMOs can fit under multiple SMIs, every SMI has at least one SMO supporting it (McCarthy and Zald 2009). While debates continue about exactly what constitutes an SMI, given this movement, I draw from pieces that see the potential for multiple SMIs under a single movement. Finally, at the top (level 4), is the broadest category, the social movement—a rather simple title that rests on the enormous foundation below it.



While many authors claim that SMOs should be the defining aspect of any social movement analysis (McCarthy and Zald 2009), others argue for the importance of networked SMOs, as well as the impact of the varying degrees of organization and differing forms (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). Snow, et al. (2009) come to an important conclusion, they advocate for the importance of transcending the debate altogether, eliminating the importance of any elevated level of organization. All that matters is the existence of organization; this organization certainly exists in the New Food Movement. The rest of this section will focus on the few SMOs with significant reach and power and the bigger SMIs.

In the case of the New Food Movement, level 2 is populated by numerous SMOs with a broad range of organization and interconnectedness. These include large, transnational SMOs (Edwards and McCarthy 2007) such as Slow Food International (SFI), the Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (FLO), and national SMOs, as well as the national

Organic Consumers Association (OCA), the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), and the Locavores (www.locavores.com), to name a few. Each of these organizations supports the movement in different ways, from protests, to conferences, to dinners, to rallies, to letter-writing campaigns to legislators. SFI is an enormous umbrella organization, with more than 100,000 members (*Slow Food International*), chapters in different countries, and what are known as local convivia in cities, towns, colleges and universities across the world. The local convivia convene meetings, organize protests, and host dinners with important members of the movement. The FLO is responsible for policing the label Fair Trade. Companies send their applications for Fair Trade Status to this organization. As such, they have great power keeping transnational corporations from taking advantage of small farmers (Raynolds 2000), especially considering that many consumers exclusively buy products that are Fair-Trade Certified (*ibid*; Lang and Gabriel 2006; Micheletti 2003). The OCA is another significant organization, with more than 850,000 members, subscribers and volunteers, including consumers, businesses and farmers. OCA adherents advocate for many issues supporting organic and social responsibility food issues (“About Us: Organic Consumers Association”), including efforts against transgenic crops in numerous states (Cline 2005). The NSAC was created in 1988 for small and mid-size family farms. The locavores, now a nationwide initiative, began with a group in San Francisco. Locavore groups have sprung up in cities across the country, hosting events similar to those of Slow Food International. All of these organizations are competing to mobilize individuals to contribute their time and money (McCarthy and Zald 2009).

Looking slightly more broadly, the New Food Movement also has SMIs; the label “Organic,” and all of its associated ideals, is one of the most salient. While the definition of SMI seems to vary by author, McCarthy and Zald explain that an SMI can be an SMO, as long as the SMO is large and has as its “goal, the attainment of the broadest preferences of a social movement” (2009: 197). Despite the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) handling the policing of the label organic, there are numerous organizations, books, and magazines devoted to pushing an organic agenda. These initiatives have created a phenomenon that means so much more than simply what the USDA has defined.

This phenomenon has created tension within the organic SMI, with different stakeholders making different claims. Rucht argued that groups experience competition within a social movement: they present different leanings, levels of radicalism, and ideas about the best use of resources (Rucht 2007). This competition can be seen by the various stakeholders in the organic movement today. In their piece published in 2000, Allen and Kovach foreshadowed what we see today: the promise made by organic agriculture that it unequivocally improves ecological soundness is a false one. The phenomenon began in the 1970s, with the employment of the term “organic.” While at the beginning of the movement, there were noticeable improvements in agriculture, increasing competition has caused ecological soundness to fall by the wayside (Allen and Kovach 2000: 230). Pollan has corroborated this claim in his books, challenging that the organic ideal is corrupted, having been co-opted by organizations of the large, environmentally unsustainable scale that consumers buying organic were originally trying to avoid (Pollan 2006: 169). These “Big Organic” companies include Earthbound Organic and Petaluma Poultry (*ibid.*: 164, 169).

Despite Pollan's claims, books answering questions surrounding what to buy continue to emerge; these books perpetuate the idealism surrounding the word "organic." Examples include Cindy Burke's *To Buy Or Not to Buy Organic: What You Need to Know to Choose the Healthiest, Safest, Most Earth-Friendly Food* (2007), which offers concrete suggestions based on questionable research about the bodily implications of eating pesticides. The research is questionable simply because nutrition is such a complicated concept that the only way to begin to understand it is to apply an overly reductionist research method (Pollan 2008). Pollan, the USDA, Burke, Earthbound Organic, and Petaluma Poultry, are individuals or organizations existing under the SMI "Organic."

Other SMIs that are decidedly smaller but intertwined with the Organic SMI include slow food and the idea of buying local. Although Slow Food International is the name of one of the organizations within this SMI, the ideas behind the slow food movement have inspired many organizations. Petrini's emphasis on being as aware as possible of food, appreciating everything that is consumed, as well as strengthening connections to food, has pervaded the rest of the New Food Movement. While impressive-sounding at first, his goals are surprisingly simple: "share a meal with a friend, shop at a farmers' market, visit a farm, start a kitchen garden" (Petrini 2005). These are the foundational ideas that structure this SMI: anyone who wants to identify as a member of this movement, as someone who cares about slow food, can do so easily. One way of achieving what Petrini seeks is by buying local. Cries of "beyond organic" and "buy local" can be heard across almost all of the New Food Movement's SMOs. In the cases of organic and slow food, the SMIs are so broad that they could easily include every member of the New Food Movement. All members would have to

do is appreciate food that's been purchased from somewhere relatively local—the threshold of locality that is acceptable remains undefined.

The heads of these SMIs, Petrini, Pollan, Burke, and other movement firebrands, can be positioned at the top of level two and level three of the pyramid, as they lead both SMOs and SMIs. While these individuals face an especially daunting task, this task is of the utmost importance in the success of the movement and individual organizations (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). The leaders are the lynchpin that holds the whole movement together. Their role in framing the movement is essential, as it serves to shape the members' understanding of the movement: “effective leaders appeal to the heterogeneous supporters and enhance the agency of their supporters as well as their own agency” (Morris and Staggenborg 2007: 184). Petrini, for example, founded and is the self-proclaimed “driving force” (Petrini 2005) of a sizable piece of the movement. He invented the idea of a Slow Food convivium, and envisioned members sharing dinners, reading books, and learning cooking skills together (www.bostonlocavores.com). J. I. Rodale, a leader of the organic movement, was credited for his instrumental role in pioneering organic farming, as well as increasing awareness and interest in organic foods. He created a magazine in the 1940s called *Organic Gardening* which paved the road for the “back to the land movement” of the 1960s and 1970s (Obach 2007). While this wave is not expressly part of the New Food Movement, his leadership planted the seeds for the movement we see today. There are numerous other examples, evinced by the many SMOs in this movement, which all need some form of leadership.

Despite his lack of affiliation with any formal SMO, an analysis of this movement would be incomplete without discussing the role of Michael Pollan. With his breakthrough works, Pollan popularized the New Food Movement to a degree not experienced before (Kleiman 2009). *The Omnivore's Dilemma* brought together fodder for arguments against the food system that had previously been littered in many other books such as those by Peter Singer, Jim Mason (2006), and Joel Salatin (2007). Pollan touched on organic, local, and slow food, among many other terms. He makes carefully crafted systemic arguments that blame the agricultural system and avoid blaming the consumers.

Like Petrini and Pollan, Alice Waters is another important member of the movement, playing roles on top of both levels two and three. As recent pieces in the *Atlantic* have revealed, she is almost omnipresent. In primary and secondary education, she champions the importance of knowing “how food grows,” designing curricula that teaches children to become “eco-gastronomes” (Flanagan 2010). While her popularity stems from her restaurant, Chez Panisse, she has catapulted into a higher status among movement members. Part of her popularity results from her many cook books (*In the Green Kitchen: Techniques to Learn By Heart* (2010), *Chez Panisse Café Cookbook* (1999), and *The Art of Simple Foods: Notes, Lessons, and Recipes From a Delicious Revolution* (2007)). She achieved celebrity status because her recipes were simple, local, and emphasized small-scale growth practices. Many movement supporters have rallied behind her. Seemingly overnight, Waters has leaped from an innovator with an influential restaurant to a movement guru. In higher education, Waters has started a large reform at Yale University by introducing gardens to the students and encouraging them to work on farms and sell subsidized produce in New Haven. She has also

shaped the campus food offerings, evicting Sysco from one of the dining halls, in favor of simpler, healthier, more delicious locally-sourced food (Kummer 2004).

Although like all movements the New Food Movement is fractured, its goals can broadly be defined as challenging our whole relationship with food, from production and distribution, to consumption. Embedded in these goals is a set of ideals in which great value is invested. The many SMOs, SMIs, and movement leaders, from all levels, rally behind the ideals about farming. They draw from history, as Pollan does when he describes the bucolic countryside of Salatin's farm in Virginia (2006), or they emphasize uniqueness, as Petrini does with his vignettes about small-scale producers and local tastes from every corner of the world (2007). Large corporations engage in the same practices, with beautiful packaging, attractive farmers, farmland, and beautiful animals. Pollan exposes that corporations simply want to sell more products (2006, 2008).

Collective Identity in the New Food Movement

Moving beyond the pyramid model, back to the social movement definition, the next aspect of this chapter considers the role of collectivities in the New Food Movement. Recent work has elaborated and elevated the importance of collective identity in movements to a much greater extent than the historical classical definitions (Hunt and Benford 2007).

Collective identity can be easily understood as creating a sense of "we-ness". This "we-ness" includes "cognitive, moral and emotional elements" (*ibid.*: 440), which are related to concepts of ideology, identity, and motivation (*ibid.*: 440). Hunt and Benford note the overall

importance of collective identity, as it “seems to be either a central concept or a residual category for nearly every theoretical perspective and empirical question associated with contemporary studies of social movements” (Hunt and Benford 2007: 433). It plays a particularly crucial role in participation; as perceived sense of collective identity increases, “participation on behalf of that collectivity [becomes] more likely” (*ibid*: 437).

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) offers a great example of collectivity in the New Food Movement. Direct agricultural markets embody the ideals outlined by Petrini, Pollan, Burke, and others. Hinrichs utilizes the term embeddedness to explore the dynamic of collectivity in these markets. As she uses the term, embeddedness refers to the inherently social aspect of direct agricultural markets and their effect of “softening” the harder aspects of consuming, marketness and instrumentality. She describes embeddedness as a mitigating factor only with respect to CSAs and farmers’ markets. And while the term “embeddedness” does not appear in the literature surrounding the New Food Movement, it is an effective tool for understanding direct markets, and attempts at creating feelings of direct market embeddedness (Hinrichs 2000: 301). The New Food Movement is full of SMOs pedaling a “buy local” agenda because local food is just that—close to home. This is the “we-ness” described by Hunt and Benford (Hunt and Benford 2007: 440, 450).

Hinrichs (2000) also explains the importance of reciprocity and trust. Hinrichs witnessed these values at farmers’ markets and also at CSAs, two major aspects of this movement, and argues that they explain the so-called “softening” effect of the relationships inherent in direct-market consumption (*ibid.*: 301). An application of some of Hunt and Benford’s ideas allows Hinrichs’ theories to be expanded, as they can help understand the

solidarity, connectedness, commitment, and agency of this movement (Hunt and Benford 2007: 450). The locations of these analyses includes farmers' markets, farm stands and any other way of supporting small, family farms (Hinrichs 2003). Hinrichs (2000) also explains the importance of reciprocity and trust—also contributing to solidarity, connectedness, commitment, and agency (Hunt and Benford 2007: 450).

Establishing the Opposition

Having recognized the collective aspect of this movement, as with all attempts to define movements, the next step involves exploring the particular target of the collective actions, whether an idea, organization, or culture. Before discussing the opposition, it is important to recognize that the New Food Movement is a lifestyle movement, and involves all of the connotations implied by this characterization, including post-industrial awareness of the problems with blind consumerism (Jasper 1997: 264). In lifestyle movements, the self is the place where the social change occurs, where the ideological frameworks are created—“action repertoires for the creation of authentic lifestyles” (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones 2008)—and immaterial goals of integrity, meaning, and authenticity are established (*ibid.*). Hunt and Benford label this as an “oppositional consciousness” (2007: 442). Jasper (1997) offers protest as “one way to create that meaning, to insist that life makes sense,” in opposition to science, which has effectively removed the meaning from life (Jasper 1997: 3). Morris and Staggenborg's research outlines a “collective action frame” goal (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). The term collective action frame is utilized to explain the development of

a shared definition of a situation. For this movement, the frame is moral-based. While Jasper's work fails to delve into food movements with any depth, his theories serve to increase understanding of this movement. For the actions that typify this movement, "it is their ability to provide a moral voice that makes protest activities so satisfying" (Jasper 1997: 5). In this movement, one which falls under Jasper's category "post-citizenship," members focus on "the environment, animal rights, and lifestyle protections" (Jasper 1997: 7). This movement has in its crosshairs specific organizations that espouse certain ideals.

This movement targets certain systems and organization: the food procurement system, the government, and large, multinational corporations like Monsanto and Cargill. The movement has villainized these corporations. With a strong history of *counterculture* and *countercuisine*, discussed extensively by Belasco (1989) and Davis (1954), the stage was set for the New Food Movement. This clearly defined opposition has made it easy for Pollan, Petrini, Waters to agree that the problems is the food procurement system. Movement adherents challenge the opacity of the system in exposés like the one written by Michael Moss in *The New York Times* (Moss 2009). Pollan, Petrini, and Waters do the same, calculating the calories required to produce a head of lettuce, or a piece of steak, explaining the problems with overfishing, and emoting about a scary future full of individuals who are overweight and completely disconnected from their food (Petrini 2007; Pollan 2006, 2008, 2009; Paumgarten 2009; Kummer 2004). One of the most commonly demonized entities is the CAFO (Confined Animal Feeding Operation), a place and method described in graphic detail by many authors. Ethicists like Jim Mason and Peter Singer (2007) discuss the dysfunctionality and inherent destructiveness of the way that most food is grown, harvested,

and shipped. In many of his books and in interviews in the movie *Food, Inc.*, Pollan, along with the CEO of Stoneyfield Farms, faults the government and capitalism, claiming that companies are allowed to run free, wreaking havoc on the earth and small farmers across the country with lawsuits and aggressive policing of any “patent-infringing” farmers. These farmers sometimes have replanted seeds which are, by law, Monsanto’s intellectual property, or sometimes the seeds have just blown onto their property from a nearby farm.

The movement valorizes the small-scale farmers as alternative heroes to the villains, emphasizing an adherence to “pastoral values” (Pollan 2006:256). Pollan (2006, 2008) and Petrini (2005) urge consumers to buy from their local farmer, describing him as friendly, approachable, aware, and simple. Pollan elevates Joel Salatin to this position, as the “local” farmer that everyone dreams about: a “happy shepherd...[a] tall fellow...in broad blue suspenders and a floppy straw hat” (Pollan 2006:125). Pollan imbues even the hat with meaning, explaining that because it is “made of grass, not, rather than plastic bespoke of independence, sufficiency, even ease” (Pollan 2006: 125). Petrini’s focuses more on the small scale, offering example of farmers around the world, or “gastronomes” who are all happy. He elevates the “heroic” acts of certain farmers who make pilgrimages to find the native corn of their ancestors. As leaders of this movement, Pollan and Petrini have created an image of the farmer as motivated by much broader goals, ideas like environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and ethics.

Institutional?

The final movement-related questions that remain are whether this movement is sustained and whether it is noninstitutional. Social movements are “defined *in part* by their use of noninstitutionalized means of action, such as appropriating and using public and quasipublic spaces for purposes other than those for which they were designed or intended” (Snow, et al. 2007: 7). The New Food Movement can be characterized by its use of public spaces. Most of the farmers’ markets take place in town centers, greens, and in parking lots (Gasteyer, et al. 2008). While not a public space by formal definition, grocery stores represent a place where the public and private meet. WFM is a “potential entry-point to political engagement” (Johnston 2007: 239). This movement has stretched beyond the bounds of institutional space.

As for the question of sustainment, or continuity, the answer is more complicated. Snow, et al. describe movement experience as “cycles of protest’ that wax and wane historically” (2007: 11). While relatively young, this movement has roots that are millennia old. As discussed previously, the vegetarianism movement (Maurer 2002), the co-op movement, the natural foods movements, and the nutrition movement all waxed and then waned, setting the stage for this movement. In the discussion of this movement, in particular, I draw on Snow, et al. to assert the importance of continuity as a measure of degree, instead of reaching a specific threshold. They qualify this, though, explaining that “it is difficult to imagine any movement making much progress in pursuing its objectives without fairly persistent, almost nagging, collective action” (Snow, et al. 2007: 11). As all of the examples thus far have illustrated, the New Food Movement is a continuous movement.

There are numerous examples of SMOs, SMIs, collectivities, and leaders who vocalize these issues regularly. Taken as one isolated example, Michael Pollan alone could be called 'fairly persistent, almost nagging,' with his regular contributions to *The New York Times*, the rate of his book publishing, and his speech tour (see www.michaelpollan.com). At the highest level of government, Michele Obama has championed the importance of local, small scale produce, by converting part of the White House lawn into a garden. In the face of the obesity epidemic, cries can also be heard from the White House for increased levels of physical fitness (Raasch 2009). All of these initiatives considered together along with figures like Petrini, and organizations like the OCA, businesses like WFM, and public figures such as Michele Obama suggest this is a robust and vital movement.

If this food activism can be understood as a broad social movement, the question that remains is what makes this movement new? While contrarians argue that this movement has been around as early as the 1830s, with James Graham, or since the post-1950s Natural Foods Movement (Gusfield 1992), Claude Fischler witnessed a problematically widening chasm between people and their knowledge of their food and its past (1988). Fischler said that it was *widening*. The lynchpin in the argument that proves the newness of this movement is not the estrangement but the response. People have been estranged from their food since they stopped growing their own food in the 17th century; this much is true. What is new, is that today the response is unified and the opposition is clear. The focus is on particular names and companies. No longer are these initiatives supported by radical hippies on the fringe of society (Carolan 2005), but by influential individuals and SMOs, giving the movement traction and legitimacy. Through the creation of a collective identity out of many disparate

organizations and highly adept leaders, through sustained efforts across a variety of disciplines, the opposition is construed as the food system as a whole—industrialization, estrangement, and globalization.

Farmers' Markets as a Consumption Space

As an alternative food network, farmers' markets have increased exponentially in popularity to supply the burgeoning desires to eat slowly, locally, and alternatively produced foods. Since 1994, the number of farmers' markets in the US has exploded from 1,700 to 5,274 ("Farmers Market Growth: 1994-2009"). Academia has been slow in responding to this trend, with most of the research having been published since the year 2000. Research has explored the reasons why people shop at farmers' markets, as well as examining them as social networks and as consumption spaces, but there are major gaps in the recent literature.

In varying case studies, researchers repeatedly pursue answers to the simple question why. They want to know why shoppers at farmers' markets are there. Some articles found that shoppers are trying to fight the global agro-food industry and get more of a sense of the local culture (Carolon 2005). In a study done in Maine, the majority of the shoppers sought to forge a relationship with the farmers and have diversity in their purchases. A smaller but still significant percentage mentioned the importance of quality. A still smaller group valued supporting local economies and agriculture open space (Hunt 2006). Another study looked at the population at farmers' markets, and seeing that many of the shoppers are older, concluded that the baby boomers are driving the increasing popularity. This study posits that

baby boomers have more money to spend, care about ecological, social, health, and animal welfare, and head straight to farmers' markets to consume ethically (Jarosz 2000). The most recent study, published in September 2009, revealed that there are rampant misconceptions among consumers. Farmers' market shoppers want to buy food that is better than the food at the supermarket. They have heard the messages of the movement and are looking for "organic," "small-scale," and "local" foods. Consumers care most about buying smaller scale and local, instead of organic. Unfortunately, as this study revealed, consumers fail to ask the right questions and verify their understanding of the meanings of these terms (Berlin, Lockeretz and Bell 2009).

Overall, research suggests that most shoppers, across the country and even the world, seem to value the social connection, reciprocity, and trust of farmers' market transactions (Hinrichs 2000; Gasteyer, et al. 2008; Carolon 2005). They also share a desire to be part of a community, a nostalgia for a sense of place, and a feeling that their visitation helps unify the community by fostering interdependence (Parkins and Craig 2009). And when compared to a supermarket, shoppers appreciate the freshness, local-ness, and quality of the products (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Some of the work distinguishes between rural and urban, but none of it mentions suburbia. A city with seemingly unending suburbs, Boston's geographic quirkiness renders the conclusions of these studies inapplicable. One of the biggest gaps in the literature, though, revolves around the idea of the New Food Movement. The movement is large and powerful, but the focus on norms has underappreciated the role of movements. The research hasn't asked consumers how they identify with the movement, if at all.

Consumption is a two-party interaction involving consumers and producers, yet somehow, most of the research has overlooked any consideration of the vendors at the farmers' markets. Alan Hunt's work is one of the only pieces that does consider the vendors (2006). He posed the question of why *vendors* go to farmers' markets and the answer was simple. Vendors were capitalizing on the ways that the increased money-making potential of direct markets, independence in business decisions, and direct contact with the consumers made it possible for them to shift their supply in accordance with the demand more readily. This one paper certainly is not conclusive. More research needs to be done, considering urban, suburban, and rural markets, farmer preferences, and vendor/consumer interplay. The constantly evolving landscape of the New Food Movement governs the success of these farmers. Looking beyond a normative frame is essential, as many of them are probably involved and informed, yet the research fails to consider their thoughts on the movement. Producers must have thoughts and feelings about the customer. In many cases, the producers are friends with the customers.

There has been a limited amount of research on the farmers' market as a space in itself. Two pieces, one by Parkins and Craig (2009), the other by Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), argue that the whole space of the farmers' market is consumed, in a symbolic sense, just like a supermarket, or a department store. In addition to buying goods at the farmers' markets, they are also buying into a nostalgia of shopping like the good old days (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). There has also been work creating a duality for all farmers' markets, whereby every farmers' market in this country is either an indigenous or an experiential market (Tiemann 2004). Gasteyer, et al. found that in Iowa, an urban/rural dichotomy exists.

The urbanites go to the markets for the atmosphere and the entertainment, and the rural shoppers are there only for the food (Gasteyer, et al. 2008). These findings pave the way for a study in Boston because of its unique seemingly endless suburban sprawl.

The most neglected aspect overall, though, is the relationship between the vendors and the consumers (Parkins and Craig 2009). Berlin, et al.'s study began to consider this relationship, as the authors explored the consumer ideals with a more critical eye. They specifically investigated the varying interpretations of the defining words of this movement, "local," "organic" and "sustainable," with an eye to other ideas and their impact on consumption preferences, namely "freshness, taste, nutritional quality, and safety" (Berlin, et al. 2009: 274). The author's exploration of the disconnect between consumers and the movement, and the consumers' misunderstanding of movement ideals was groundbreaking. Furthermore, the comprehensiveness was also new for this relatively nascent field.

For all of the questions they have answered, these studies have provoked many more. They have successfully established a relatively clear understanding of why consumers shop at farmers' markets. When considered in concert, all of the literature seems to point towards a developing idealism on the part of the consumers. However, only the most recent pieces have begun to dig below the surface of this idealism. These recent studies raise some important questions: What is the source of the consumer notions about farmers and regulations at the market? Is anyone perpetuating the misinformation, or is it just a lack of information? This thesis will probe deeper, developing a more comprehensive understanding of the collective idealism. It will also explore the beginnings of these ideas and consider their origination. As the first qualitative research to interview farmers, this is also the first piece to

fully recognize the dualistic nature of consumption: buying and selling. For the first time ever for the field, a detailed look into the world of the farmer will be chronicled. The experience of the vendor will be juxtaposed with that of the consumer. This research will also examine the vendors' perception of the consumers, shedding light on the extant chasm between the consumer ideals and the vendor reality.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Statewide, Massachusetts has 195 farmers' markets (Wilbur). A sizable percentage of them are located in and around Boston. Boston has urban markets, near City hall Plaza and Copley Square, as well suburban markets, located in Boston's wealthier suburbs, including Wellesley, Lexington, Wayland, and Natick. Some areas such as Dorchester and Roxbury, have subsidized farmers' markets. Recently, a few winter markets have cropped. While previous research was mostly quantitative, this research is based on ethnographic and interview-based research, allowing the author to perform more in depth research. Using both methods will enhance the analysis, allowing the author to analyze not only what the vendors and consumers say, but also allowed observation of how they behave at the markets. This necessitated a relatively busy market, ruling out some of the single-vendor markets, including ones in Dorchester and Roxbury.

I chose two of Boston's most popular markets for my research: one urban and one suburban. Given that my data collection would not begin until the 2nd week of September, 2009 I needed markets that would be open relatively late in the season. The urban market, which we will call Metropolitan, is open into November, and the suburban market, which we will call Bayville, is open until late October. Furthermore, of the busier markets that I visited, these two seemed the most distinct. While difficult to quantify, the overall interaction of the consumers energy at the markets diverged. At Metropolitan, consumers and producers have a much more transactional relationship, with little interaction or banter; the farmers' market is a stop along their path, a means to an ends. The Bayville market is seemingly a destination

in itself. Consumers are less hurried and tend to come in family groups; the market serves as a place of significant social interaction. While this piece will deviate from studying the suburban/urban spectrum, the relative urban location will provide invaluable context to the argument framing.

Metropolitan is nestled in the heart of one of Boston's highest traffic and wealthier areas. While demographics for Metropolitan, in particular, are not available, a review of the area can be conclusive in its own respects. Train lines, bus routes, and subway lines make the market quite accessible. Major pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares surround the market on three sides. Because of the variety of entry and exit points, as well as the mixed-use nature of the surrounding area, passersby vary greatly in their use of the space. This market is, by many accounts, located at one of the centers of Boston. In addition, while advertisements for this market are absent, the scale of it—a couple dozen white tents surrounding three sides of a park near the center of the city—makes it hard to miss.

While similarly wealthy, Bayville is a town, more residential and much smaller. Its access is far more limited. The only public transportation is a single bus line, a few hundred feet away, that runs a few times an hour. Bayville is well advertised, with signs up all week long around the Bayville town center and on the day of the market, additional signs can be found around the parking lot. The market is managed by a team, which includes a web-developer. As such, the market has its own website where they list the vendors, provide recipes, and information about the market, including weather-related cancellations, and information about new vendors, vendor spotlights, directions, hours, and even a newsletter. The managing team increases their transparency, as well, explaining the requirements for

acceptance to the markets. From the advertisements to the websites, all of these efforts contribute to the creation of a sense of community. This stems from the vendors; at the end of this market, all of the vendors had a potluck dinner at the house of the market manager. However, it seems to continue, with the customers spending greater amounts of time there. Studying this market would offer an opportunity to examine and unpack this sense of community.

The vendors at the two markets varied greatly. Metropolitan had a great diversity of vendors who were all very consistent with their appearances. Bayville had vendors that came only on certain weeks, or some that came every other week. Two of the produce vendors and the cheese vendor sold at both the Metropolitan and Bayville markets. The chart below reveals the numbers of each type of vendor.

Vendor Type	Bayville	Metropolitan
Produce Vendors	5	6
Certified Organic Produce Vendors	2	1
Baked Goods (breads, sweets)	3	4
Packaged Foods	0	1
Crafts	0	2
Meat	1	1
Cheese	1	1
Plants / Teas	1	1
Eggs	1	0
Chocolate	1	0
Pasta	1	0
Fish	1	0
Oil, Spreads, Syrups	2	0
Coffee	1	0

Data Collection: Observations

My observations began at the end of September, and lasted five weeks. I conducted 30 hours of ethnographic fieldwork, with 15 hours at each site. I would watch a particular vendor for a period, as much as a half an hour, and noting the consumers coming and going. Over the course of all of the fieldwork, I made sure to have notes on as many vendors as possible, understanding that there is a wide variation in customers: some customers visit single vendors, others many, also, interactions at a produce vendor could differ greatly from a fish vendor or a chocolate vendor. I focused my time and attention, \ on the busier vendors, as they presented more data gathering opportunities. There were a few instances when I was, coincidentally, able to follow a particular customer around the market, and distinguish between interactions with different vendors. I took notes on verbatim verbal conversations, while also including body language, conversation engagement, and facial expressions. I also looked at physical appearance, including dress, looking for the distinction between business attire and dress that is more casual. All of these details enhanced the research, contextualizing the individuals, which will add greater depth to the arguments. My decisions on what to note, besides conversations, was informed by my understanding of the New Food Movement. For instance, I considered the importance of grocery bags. Given the burgeoned interest in using reusable bags and the social stigmatization of using bags made from nonrenewable resources, like plastic bags, as well as the signaling power, by the name on the bag, I noted the bagging choices of the consumers (Johnston 2007: 230, 236). I recognize that bag type can be a way that New Food Movement adherents indicate their support, perhaps by carrying a WFM bag, or a Trader Joe's Bag, or a bag sold by one of the vendors at the market, itself. I also made inferential notations on the relationship between shoppers. Given the

different markets, at certain times of the day, different consumers would show up, from families, to business professionals, to individuals looking college-aged.

Near the end of my observations at Bayville, I began my recruitment of participants via a convenience sample of market patrons. I collected interviewees by approaching market shoppers who seemed to have time; I avoided the cyclists and those individuals who seemed rushed. My process began with an introduction and a request for a few minutes of the individual's time, and then I explained my research, and posited a few questions. If they asked for any more details, as some did, I handed them an informational sheet on my research question and expectations for interviews. At Bayville, all but one person I initiated a conversation with was willing to answer my questions. After speaking with them briefly about their farmers' market shopping habits and their reasoning for shopping there, I would inform them that I was conducting more in-depth conversational-style interviews. I then asked them if they had time to participate. Everyone who answered my questions at Bayville furnished their email and/or phone number to me. Within seven days, I emailed and/or called everyone who had given me his or her information. I set up interviews with respondents until I had five interviews planned.

As discussed previously, one of the greatest benefits of this research is the comprehensiveness; it includes both consumers *and* vendors. This allows me to compare the parallel experiences and map the respective perceptions of farmers and consumers on each other. I could ask the vendors about their understanding of consumer wants and desires, as well as their own experiences and stories. I also asked the consumers about their own reasons for shopping, their perceptions of the vendors, and their feelings about the market as

a whole. To get the vendor information, after having spoken with them for the past six weeks, and built up rapport with them, on the last day, I took down their information and told them I would contact them in December, when the growing season ended.

At Metropolitan, I collected participants throughout the whole month of November. My method was the same as for Bayville, though respondents were slightly more guarded, a few individuals refused to speak with me, or give me their information. In the end, I was able to collect a sizable number of potential respondents. I set up interviews with the first people who responded to me. As for vendors, I took down their information throughout November, and contacted them in mid to late December to set up a time to interview them.

Data Collection: Interviews

My interviews began during the last week of October and lasted through the beginning of January at a variety of locations and times. I was able to achieve an even split between Metropolitan and Bayville consumer interviews, five from each. My consumer interviews varied: eight took place in person, in cafés, and two were over the phone. The sample may have an unusually high number of respondents who are relatively passionate farmers' market shoppers, as they were chosen on the colder days, for Metropolitan, and on one of October's coldest, wettest days, for Bayville. Future research may be useful to capture more casual or "fair-weather" consumers. As for vendors, I interviewed eight in total: three baked goods vendors, two farmers, a cheesemaker, a meat vendor, and a prepared foods vendor. Three interviews took place at their farms, one of them over the phone, four in cafes,

and one at their bakehouse. I was not able to interview any Certified Organic farmers, which is unfortunate. Because of the significant investment required to become certified by the USDA, and higher prices commanded by the produce, they would undoubtedly offer a unique perspective. Research on these organic/nonorganic and price/quality dichotomies could be revealing of consumer trends and preferences, adding depth to the limited consumer/producer farmers' market research in existence.

For the interviews, I developed two separate interview guides. Both interview guides were composed in such a way as to build rapport with the interviewees, to help make them comfortable, through asking them questions about their shopping habits and preferences, as well as exploring the rationale behind their buying decisions (see Appendix A for consumer interview guide and Appendix B for vendor interview guide). While the interviews were qualitative, with the discussion largely driven by the experiences of the respondents, I focused on questions about modern food trends. The guide evolved along with the interviews, with questions designed to elicit deeper, more thoughtful responses to questions that, generally, few of the participants had spent much time thinking about.

The interviews varied significantly in length and focus. The consumer interviews varied from short phone interviews, of only 30 minutes in length, to one which lasted three-hours. Whenever we were at a coffee shop, I always offered to buy the interviewees coffee and most obliged. They also all agreed to be digitally recorded. The vendor interviews had less length variability, ranging from 30 minutes to 90 minutes long. The respondent pool exhibits relative diversity: the oldest was in her 60s and the youngest in his early 20s. All were employed, with varying professions: teachers, transcriptionists, secretaries, research

assistants, and business consultants. In terms of racial diversity, all were Caucasian. I interviewed seven female consumers and four male consumers. The male/female spread is a reflection of response time and interviewees willingness to setup an interview.

Having collected all of the data, I coded it all, as openly as possible. My coding was informed by Howard Becker's books on research methods (1998, 2007), employing his ideals on research sampling and null-hypothesis coding. While my question hinges on my understanding of the New Food Movement, I remained open to the idea that the New Food Movement does not actually have any real relationship to the farmers' market experience. I recognize that the large scale and multifarious nature of what I call the New Food Movement make it an especially difficult movement to map. As such, my coding focused on what my respondents were saying, instead of searching for movement-based terminology. I recognize that as a supporter of this movement, I have an inherent bias. I shop at farmers' markets regularly, consider myself a foodie, and a locavore. However, I do not believe that it had any significant impact on my data analysis or conclusions.

CHAPTER 3: THINKING AND SHOPPING IRRESPECTIVE OF THE MOVEMENT

Nothing I do is part of a larger movement. I do my things myself for my own reasons and rather often find that other people have come to the same conclusions independently. There's probably a certain amount of stuff floating around in the air but I tend to be so unaware of what the trend of the moment is. And if people lecture me and preach at me, I'm inclined to point out what's wrong with their reasoning. (Christine, consumer)

Christine was part of a family that had been farming the same plot of land for generations, but she had avoided the profession. At 67, Christine had lived through and supported the historical back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s. In fact, during that time she was in school at U.C. Berkeley, the movement's epicenter (Belasco 1989). She attributed her antagonistic attitude toward her age and experience with the "original" movement: she repeatedly described herself as "old" and as having seen a lot in her lifetime. She used this to explain herself and the fact that everyone seems to come to the same conclusions as her, their "lectures", a word connoting attempts at instruction, or greater knowledge, frustrate her. She wanted to challenge the movement's many nuanced identities. Perhaps her challenge to the excitement surrounding the movement today stems out of a sense of repetition; she witnessed a very similar transformation, with co-ops as the tool for change, in the '60s and '70s. The movement of those decades was described as "countercuisine" and "counterculture"—it was going against the prevailing direction, challenging the status quo (Belasco 1989), which also could have laid the groundwork for her passionate response. Christine's adversarial attitude towards the movement seems to distinguish her from most of

the other interviewees. However, her primary claim that she is not a part of any broader movement is commonplace among shoppers.

When asked if they were involved in a broader movement, many interviewees responded with a simple, “No, I don’t think so.” At the beginning of the research, I assumed that this response must be anomalous, especially since most interviewees took little time to equivocate. However, as the interviews continued, this answer became the norm instead of the exception. Despite the extensive movement activity described in Chapter 1, when asked about a connection between farmers’ market shopping and any broader movement, consumers deny both involvement and support, citing a variety of other reasons justifying their purchases. In this chapter, I will show the prevalence of anti-movement sentiments and then describe the respondents’ motives for farmers’ market patronage.

Dean had a response similar to that given by Christine. Dean has been shopping at farmers’ markets for 20 years both here in Boston, and then later in California. He described himself as individual and distinct from the movement: “I’m not terribly affected by those [activists] because I was doing them [shopping at farmers’ markets] first.” A comparison of Dean and Christine is rather revealing: they both spent time in California and witnessed the birth and development of today’s movement; through earlier experiences, they developed and solidified their relationship to food long ago; both feel that the movement is following them; and both feel that the movement has a certain Johnny-come-lately stigma. Associated with this movement, there seems to be a sense of being a follower, or a sheep, instead of a pioneer, or a shepherd. They repeatedly proclaimed their independence from the food politics, which they construed as both the New Food Movement and the increasing prevalence of fast food.

While Christine and Dean were unique in their rejection of the movement as a whole, several respondents criticized specific elements of the movement. A few interviewees expressed frustration about one of the core tenets of the movement: buying local. Instead of challenging the whole idea of buying local, Chelsea, a graduate student studying food policy, challenged some specific aspects of the movement. With a husband who works on a farm, Chelsea described the abundance of food that her husband brought from his farm during the growing months, between the spring and fall. She shopped at the farmers' market minimally, if at all. She offered a unique perspective, though, because before her husband worked on a farm, she frequented the farmers' markets multiple times every week. When asked about the idea of eating locally, and the associated movement, Chelsea commented on the San Francisco-based locavores. Members of the organization eat food only grown within 100 miles of the San Francisco area (www.locavores.com). The website lists hundreds of names and has inspired offshoots in cities all across America. However, Chelsea decried the whole idea: "it's impossible to do this 100-mile diet and I don't really think that that's what buying local is about."

While it could be simply be a commentary on the New England area, known for its harsh, inhospitable winters, Chelsea renounced the specificity of this movement, in favor of a more qualitative, awareness-based movement ideology: "I think that it's being conscious of where your food is coming from and thinking about your food choices." She argued that this consciousness, or awareness, should play a larger role than adherence to rigid rules. She elaborated on the justification of her opinion, challenging the very basis for joining the locavores: "I don't think that anyone actually thinks that you're being more sustainable. I

mean people do it for a gimmick. I've never heard anyone say that they think everyone should eat all year-round, from within 100-miles." In calling it a "gimmick", she questions the legitimacy of this interpretation of local by questioning its sustainability, one of the very fundamental reasons for eating local. A visit to the locavores website, though, reveals that the website is peppered with words about sustainability. Furthermore, the site offers a list of yearlong locavores. The list contains hundreds of names from across the country. The locavores take the challenge seriously. They have a map with a circle drawn around it representing the 100-mile radius. Despite their seriousness, Chelsea still describes the identification and specificity.

Later in her interview, she elaborated on her issues, explaining the relationship between pesticides and local. In considering the role of pesticides, she explained, "If it's a local farmer who's dowsing his produce in pesticides, I mean, that means the cancer is just closer to me, right?...I don't want local cancer." She feels that blind, unchecked support of the movement ideals is problematic, unrealistic, and potentially hazardous to your health and well-being. Given her credibility, as a nutritionist, conducting the very research that plays an instrumental role in the movement, her words also carry extra weight. Chelsea's comments offer a window into one aspect of the movement: the tension that exists between those at the forefront, marketing dogmatic lifestyle decisions, and those with similar concerns, but a more flexible approach.

Other consumers challenged the perceived role of pesticides in terms of health, with the challenge stemming from a cynicism about the health claims. Given many movement supporters advocate the use of organic products, supporters need to trust the certification

process overseen by the USDA. However, when I asked one consumer, Rachel, about her shopping habits, and whether or not she would buy organic, she showed skepticism:

But can we prove it, overall, that there is a big difference? No one can. We can trust that they're saying that they're organically grown and produced and hope that that is the truth. But for the most part, I'm not going to buy into that. And what do you think about the organic certification, like the USDA [sic] – does that? Again, it's a matter of faith. Yeah. I mean, they can say that they certified that they are organically grown, but it's a matter of faith.

She challenged the legitimacy of the certification process, and questions the health benefits of organic products. The claims surrounding the organic movement—that using organic pesticides and fungicides improves consumers' health and the environment—rest on a belief in the validity of the certification process.⁵ Consumers must trust the USDA certifiers to do their job. While many consumers at the farmers' market choose not to buy organic produce, many of the interviewees described price as the deterring factor. Therefore, Rachel is not unique in choosing to avoid identifying with the idea of “Buy Organic;” the many different aspects of this movement allow for numerous and varied aspect-specific identifies. Her rationale is unique, though, in its basis on skepticism rather than cost.

⁵ As a discussion with one farmer revealed, “Organic” indicates the use of non-synthetic pesticides. However, fungicides, and various naturally occurring pesticides can and are still used.

If Not For the Movement, Then Why Shop at the Farmers' Market?

This anti-movement sentiment raises some important questions. As market shoppers and vendors explained, trips to the grocery store are needed to supplement trip to the farmers' market because the market fails to offer enough of the staples. Dairy products in particular, as well as items like cereal and canned goods, are scarce. If farmers' markets are not especially convenient or inspiring, why are shoppers visiting them? Why are people spending additional time and money shopping? Although shoppers emphasize the individuality of their preferences and goals, in general consumers do share an appreciation of certain aspects of farmers' markets, namely the quality of goods, the connection to people and place, and the difference in the shopping experience, as a whole.

While on at the surface, consumers appear to shop at the farmers' markets for reasons that seem to align with the existing research, respondents revealed that, in fact, farmers' market appreciation is much broader, with consumers considering the causes and effects of increased quality, "small-scale", and "local" (Beril, Lockeretz and Bell 2009; Carolon 2005; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Consumers utilized varying vocabulary to express priorities at the market, from freshness, to taste, to appearance. Many shoppers seemed simply to enjoy how the produce looks. At Metropolitan passersby would gaze at the produce, sometimes make a remark, and then take out their cameras and take pictures of the produce. Some utilized Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras, but many just used their phone. Most of these passersby would simply take a picture, without even making a purchase. Often I would overhear shoppers remark that the produce is "the most beautiful," or how they describe the sunflowers as "looking happy."

Interviews reinforced how important the visual aspect of the experience is for farmers' market consumers. Rachel found that the shortened supply chain significantly improved the quality:

When I go I like to be able to look at fresh fruits and vegetables and know that I'm not buying something that's already been pounded or scarred or...I don't know. I don't like having fruits or vegetables that have already been beaten up and look pretty bad. Then by the time I get it to my house, it's pretty unappetizing. So that's definitely another big issue for me.

While not explicit, Rachel's use of such graphic and violent language to describe the produce from the supermarket indicates her negative emotions regarding the length of the supply chain. She described later in her interview her frustration with having many hands on her produce, or machines, which she viewed as even worse. At the market, instead of food traveling hundreds, or in some cases, thousands of miles, she enjoys knowing that the distance spanned between the field and her table is much shorter.⁶ She seems to think that the farmers will treat her produce with greater care, or perhaps just that the decrease in distance travelled increases quality.

Dean explained that freshness is paramount to him. When I asked him how he would feel if he could get "fresh produce from Argentina arriving only two days after being picked," he responded, "that's a hell of a lot better than the stuff that's been sitting around in warehouses for a month. But – well, the other piece of that, of course, is that flying it in from Argentina is very expensive, and – expensive in money and in carbon." Dean is aware of the

⁶ Pollan, along with many others, discusses the increasing Food Miles between consumers in the United States and the location of the farm where their produce was grown (2006, 2008, 2009).

food issues, and problems surrounding long flights. He explained that, for him, “In Washington, in Seattle, they’re so crazy about local that one vendor says, ‘Only 14 food miles from the farm to you!’ Eh, who cares! Whether it’s 14 or 54, I don’t care. Is it good? That’s what matters to me.” While he is clearly aware of the environmental impact and the implications of increased food miles, he privileges freshness over these concerns.

Chelsea also made an important link between the appearance of food and its taste and freshness:

But the other thing is, a good appearance tends to mean it’s more durable, actually, because if it will hold up to holding its appearance after being thrown on a truck and so on, that means it’s not as easily bruisable, not as easily squishable, you know? And it’s likely to rot less easily.

Chelsea rationalizes her desire for attractive produce, by equating it with quality. Chelsea’s claims were challenged, though, by a few interviewees. One consumer explained how anomalous heirloom tomatoes were in that “the uglier they look, the better they taste.” Thus, while most consumers consider appearance as being important in the way of a very red tomato, or a very green pepper, in fact, the most important aspect is that the produce is heartier. This claim is far from universal, though, as other interviewees discussed items like raspberries, in terms of their fragility. Consumers noticed that the more fragile fruit like berries, when handled correctly, tasted very different than what could be purchased at the supermarket.

One shopper skipped equivocation in favor of universal appreciation. Rebecca, a relatively new farmers’ market shopper, explained: “Overall, everything is better. Especially the heirloom tomatoes. You can’t find that sort of thing in the regular supermarket.” She

visits the market because she feels she can get a major increase in quality and more diverse produce offerings, with the farmers' market offering more local items and dozens of heirloom varieties.

While varying in the specific goals, a few consumers explained the importance of nutrition. Emily, an individual who works in business, expressed a preference for farmers' market produce because of decreased pesticides:

Things aren't as...the farmers market is...picked the same day so they don't have as much chemicals in it to like keep it fresh for so long. So I think um...it's just you know, grown with less, just more better quality, less chemicals, whatever, because it's just farm, to the farmers' market, same day. So they don't have to worry about shipping and that certainly makes it healthier.

Her understanding of the use of pesticides, that long-distance transportation necessitates their use, motivates her to avoid the supermarket. Jesse, a schoolteacher expressed similar sentiments. For him, the broader impact on the environment provoked his feelings: "What poisons and toxins are out there, they get inside us. It's only a matter of reason, and who wants to live in a garbage dump? I think that rationality motivates a good amount of what – my interest in these topics." Jesse offers yet another example of a widely-accepted misconception about pesticides. While the connection of pesticide ingestion with health degradation remains relatively tenuous (Burke 2007), causation still appears to have been relatively widely disseminated.

While many consumers discussed the importance of nutrition in their eating choices, only a few made a causal connection between shopping at the farmers' market and more nutritional food. One customer described the impact of the farmers' market on the community as a whole: "Well I definitely think it adds to the community. And they have them

in so many different communities that I think people do tend to buy healthier local food.”

Although this claim of improved nutrition is tenuous, it is important precisely because of how frequently it is cited by farmers’ market shoppers. Other interviewees had similar misconceptions. Three of them operated under the presumption that food at the farmers’ markets contained no pesticides. Based on this logic, these consumers shopped at the market to increase healthfulness by avoiding pesticides and their residues. This was surprising, especially given that some of the consumers had family members who worked on farms. The basis of this perception of the farmers’ market as a pesticide-free paradise remains unclear. At both markets, only three of the fourteen vendors were certified organic, or claimed to follow organic guidelines. Regardless, the misconception perseveres.

One of the vendors, an owner of a farm, had her own explanation for the shoppers’ preoccupation with nutrition. Barbara thought that everyone was motivated by a desire to live longer: “I think that people want to eat healthier. I think because they want to live longer. I mean, they want to be able to do things longer in life than sit back and end up in the nursing home with somebody taking care of them.” While this conjecture remains unsubstantiated, the logic behind her conclusion, that people now associate healthier food with increased lifespan, considered in conjunction with her overall lack of movement identification and understanding of movement knowledge, speaks to the success of dissemination of messages by the movement, the government, farmers, and nonprofit organizations, that challenge the status quo of unhealthy fast food.

The direct, interpersonal relationship between producers and consumers also emerged as very important. For some interviewees, this relationship offered practical benefits:

I would like the vendors to be knowledgeable. If I say you know, how should I store this from keep it from going bad, I would like the vendors to be able to tell me correctly...If I say, you know, how would you cook this it would be nice for the vendor to be able to tell me. (Lila, consumer)

The experience that the vendors had with the produce helped raise this consumer's confidence, allowing her to branch out and try new items. For Lila, who had a job in the restaurant business, food knowledge and understanding were of great importance. She claimed that it was her responsibility to cook healthy food for her spouse and herself. To this end, buying from a farmer who is knowledgeable and who can make accurate suggestions for keeping food fresh is very valuable.

This appreciation of the farmers appeared elsewhere, including transactions that involved more exotic produce. A few of the producers offered rainbow carrots. Consumers would come up and ask, "I've never seen rainbow carrots, are they like normal carrots?" with an excited, engaged tone. The exotic nature of the produce increased its appeal. The same occurred with mushrooms. One of the vendors offered wild, foraged mushrooms, and customers would come up and speak, very loudly and fast, about how excited they were about the mushroom: "I love these mushrooms. They're the best shitake mushrooms I've ever had." The same vendor also had exotic types of radishes, and consumers would remark, "those are the most beautiful radishes I've ever seen." One consumer, in particular, said "that is the most beautiful produce I've ever seen." This points to the conclusion that the more exotic the produce, the greater the appreciation the consumer derives.

Overall, though, this relationship is characterized by its utility, not by its camaraderie. When asked about the connection shoppers shared with vendors, every single interviewee

responded with some variation of “what connection?” or “I have no connection, no relationship, no friendship.” However, during much of the ethnographic aspect of my research, both consumers and producers would engage in casual banter. For example, one consumer walked up to a vendor and said, laughing, “tartlet is a great word to say.” Other consumers would tease vendors, prodding them about the uselessness of organic with a sarcastic tone. Some customers would come every week and could only be described as friends of the vendors. They would discuss their families, and their relationships, transcending the transactional producer/consumer relationship. While none of the interviewees discussed this, given the limited sample of only 22 interviews, foreseeably the interviews I conducted were with individuals in the majority of farmers’ market shoppers without the more profound connection. Having witnessed hundreds of interactions over the 30 hours of observations, most of the relationships do not transcend consumption-based purposiveness. Instead, questions surrounding price, quality, variety, and cooking advice, especially, occurred consistently.

A select few of the vendors explained that they were, in fact, friends with consumers. In one interview, I asked Ann, a dairy vendor, who her favorite customers were. Ann had an instant response:

My one customer, she’s a good friend. I mean, a lot of these people have become really good friends. We email. We correspond. We go to visit during the winter. A lot of the kids who started out at my market, 12 years later, they’re at college... So these people you see week after week, for five-to-six months, year after year. And they grow with you. So it’s really fun... They bring you little presents, and if you’re having a bad day, they come and cheer you up.

While she discussed the closeness of the connection, something the grocery store just cannot offer, she also could only name a handful of customers with whom she shared such a close relationship. Considered in conjunction with my observations, this reveals that only a select few consumers reach “friend” stature.

One of the interviewees offered a completely diverging rationalization for shopping at the farmers’ market. While only visiting the farmers’ market occasionally, Jesse found inspiration for his shopping preferences in religious leaders, an idea which certainly has not come through in any major way in this movement. Instead of seeking a connection with anyone in particular, Jesse tried to establish connection in the broader sense: to nature.

We try to get chickens that lived in free ranging areas and aren’t raised in pens. He rises from a Hindu tradition, Mahatma Ghandi. I like his writings a great deal, so I think it’s – there is a relationship between my interest in eastern religion and organic farming. And I think there’s also – I think it’s related to my interest in Native American studies, things like Chief Seattle. He talks about earth doesn’t belong to man, man belongs to the earth. I’ve read various things and they resonate with me. They interest me.

While many shoppers discussing a desire to be closer to their food and closer to nature, no one besides Jesse connects it to any historical traditions. Jesse’s correlation of Eastern ideas with shopping at the farmers’ market not only separates him from the movement, but it also indicates the possibility of freedom of actualization of movement goals, or in movement speak, articulation and elaboration (Snow, et al. 2007).

Movement Permeation

Despite the fact that shoppers seemed distant from and in some cases antagonistic toward the New Food Movement, in many ways, they sound as though they have adopted the goals of the movement. Movement influence is both implicit and pervasive, with varying aspects of the movement and to varying degrees. As a whole, Slow Food-based concepts surfaced the most often in the interviews. Slow Food, one of the largest SMOs in the movement, advocates for the importance of preserving local flavors. In one interview, Phil, having previously denied support for the movement, explained the following:

I'd rather [buy the] older varieties that [are not] not genetically manipulated...the varieties from years at home, when varieties were sometimes limited to being on a single farm. And I think it's a good idea that people conserve those and I think it's a good idea that people bring those back. I worry, actually, about the diversity of our food.

These sentiments could just as easily be words that could come directly from Carlo Petrini, the head of the organization, or one of his organizations' many publications and conferences. While it is not possible to claim that the New Food Movement's reach is significant enough to dictate every customers' pursuit of quality, this shopper seems to have been influenced, even if indirectly, by the movement. When asked if his shopping habits signify involvement in a movement, Jesse explained "Just so that I would be able to support a farm directly nearby and not – and to avoid the product delivery / food delivery system that exists in this country as a whole." Here, the connection between New Food Movement ideals and farmers' market shopping are again audible. Jesse's word choice of "product delivery / food delivery system" parallels the language used in many New Food Movement initiatives. The question that both

Phil's and Jesse's comments raise is if shoppers deny identifying with or supporting the movement, but invoke the movement's ideas, what is their role in the movement, if at all?

Phil was far from alone, as many other shoppers discussed frustration with the modern food system. Christine, for example, described her frustration with the degradation of taste and quality of apples:

Originally they were called red delicious because they were delicious. But then they got – the whole system got hybridized down or whatever it is, or they concentrated on the ability to withstand storage and on looks, and so we got away from the delicious part and just concentrated on the red...red delicious apples are a great example of fruit that looks beautiful and tastes like sawdust.

Remembering a time when apples were delicious, Christine expresses her anger over the manipulation of the apples. Her complaint, one which is often heard by vocal members of the New Food Movement, is that technology is adulterating food to the point of making it undesirable. Despite her denial of movement involvement, she behaves like a movement supporter in speech and action.

One farmer described a frequent scenario: some groups would take a whole weekend to visit and experience her farm—a Slow Foodie's dream:

We have had people come to the farm just because they want to see where the stuff was coming from and I mean, we even had a couple...well it was a group of young people that rented a car to come out to the farm. The trend is, they want to see where stuff is coming from. Not only do they want to talk to the farmer here, but they are interested in seeing the other end of it too. Where it's coming from. And we've had several, and it seems like this past year it's been more...I mean, a lot of families with kids if they have a car they want to do something on the weekend they know that they can bring the kids out and there is a petting area and there is a hayride and the kids can pick their own fruit and things so it's a learning experience, it's a fun experiences, it's recreation, all of it.

Families making the decision to visit a farm on a weekend and vendors observing this trend, of consumers seeking experience-based knowledge and understanding of the supply chain, are both signs that the agenda that Slow Foodies have been pushing for decades might be succeeding. The most important parts described by the interviewees remains the “learning”, “fun”, and “recreation” in describing an activity that departs significantly from fast food and watching television, ideas demonized by Petrini throughout his crusade.

The Importance of “Buy Local”

Other links to the New Food Movement were visible during my fieldwork. Despite the rule stating that vendors at markets in Massachusetts must sell produce only grown in this state, many consumers would ask vendors where, exactly, the farms were located. They wanted reference points, and would continue asking questions until they knew exactly the location of the farms. Customers were asking these questions in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the origins of their food. Many consumers would ask exactly *how* local the products were, especially the prepared products. Noticing this curiosity, a chocolate vendor mentioned, “locally produced right here in Somerville” to every customer who approached her tent. This information seemed to increase consumer interest, engagement, and willingness to buy; many would come closer to the tent and try a sample. While I recognize that offering a free sample could shape reactions, consumers who responded the most positively exclaimed “wow” when learning just how local the product was. Most consumers

were satisfied by this conception of local, but those who asked additional questions learned that the beans are actually from the Caribbean but that they are ground in Somerville and turned into chocolate. Accordingly, their excitement decreased slightly. Another vendor of prepared foods had noticed a similar trend. Jim explained, “You can see that kind of emotional response that goes on when we say, ‘We’re made in Massachusetts’ or ‘We are a [town just outside of Boston] company.’” Customers, used to the prepared foods of unknown origin that are available in the center of the supermarket (Pollan 2008), become especially excited when they can buy a product of a town that they have actually traveled to.

While the movement broadly disseminates the importance of buying local, one consumer, Rebecca, had specific reasons for wanting to buy local. She cited a desire to reduce pesticide use and the potential that a shortened supply chain has to help support this goal, while also decreasing reliance on other countries:

It reduces the transportation from one place to another and like the amount. I think it reduces the amount of pesticides that need to be on the food for it to be kept well when it’s transported. And I guess it’s just better for local economies, so you’re not relying on... other countries, like South America, or Australia, for your produce. (Rebecca, consumer)

Like Phil’s and Jesse’s use of Slow Movement language, Rebecca’s discussion of local economies could also have come directly from a buy local movement proponent. The buy local initiative also argues that consumers should support local economies and reduce the environmental impact.

Christine explained the connection between local and the environment: “That’s probably part of the local package—not as dependent on really perverse things like the petroleum economy.” Although she thinks of herself as outside of the movement, this

information is from proponents of buying local and the research done to support the movement. Whether identifying with the movement or not, Christine relies on information pulled directly from the movement to justify her buying decisions.

In another interview, Dean, another consumer who did not associate himself with the New Food Movement, also enumerated his frustrations with the current food procurement system, offering an unintentional summary of the movement today. I asked Dean about the value of local food. After pausing to think for a moment, he said the following:

But your question was about local. It somehow – all this – I think there’s a romanticism that goes with farming that goes to the local. It’s an enhancement of life, but it’s not essential...We’ve screwed up our grocery system – our whole food system. They’re economies of scale that build by big distribution that we lose so much, and I’m talking freshness and flavor and that sort of – that really makes a difference to me.

Dean’s language bears remarkable similarity to movement publications—“screwed up food system,” “economies of scale,” “freshness and flavor”—these are the words and ideas that pepper movement literature. But if Dean “isn’t” a member of the movement, what is he? Is he a bystander? A distant supporter? Is he a leader, perhaps, because he blazes his own path, borrowing movement terminology, but refusing to adhere to the movement, officially? Perhaps the movement is following him.

Another word which came out in a few of the interviews was accountability, and although the word itself has not been utilized by movements, it could be considered an extension of the movement ideals. Phil described the following:

It just feels like there is more accountability, I guess. I like being able to say to the people who make the apple cider, this is awesome apple cider. I like being able to say this food is good or bad to someone who actually has some power to actually affect that. With the supermarkets, again, with maybe the fish

department or something you can say, that looks good I don't want that, but with most things you get what you get.

In this case, Phil seems to appreciate the power that he has. Despite decrying the protectionist “bubble” established by many members of the movement, Phil has ideas in line with the movement. His use of the word “accountability” is an important word in the movement lexicon, as it indicates increased responsibility. These words convey the gravity of these issues, a recognition that the movement is desperately trying to disseminate. In this case, specifically, Phil's influence and potential to impact his food quality is very desirable and important, especially when juxtaposed with standard, non-direct food procurement methods.

To satisfy the desire for accountability exemplified by Phil, vendors employed the word “trust.” One vendor of prepared foods explained the following:

I am hoping that consumers will then build up a certain level of trust that maybe our competitors don't have because they have exaggerated things and that there will be more of an emotional...yeah maybe more of an emotional bond with the product because it is something that, intuitively they trust and we haven't mislead them, we have been truthful.

This vendor is relying on the idea of emotions and trust to sell his product. He takes advantage of the direct market and the increase in personal knowledge and responds to the desire for accountability described by consumers.

The implicit influence of movement ideals on farmers' market shoppers who are either resistant to, or unaware of, the new food movement raises some significant questions, one of the most important for movement scholars remains what role do these individuals play in a movement? With the advent of consumer activism, movements encourage consumers to

consume politically as a way of joining a movement. However, despite many individuals trying to be aware of the ethical implications of their consumption habits, they do not seem to care about making a larger political or movement-based statement. Despite this separation from the movement, they still state many of the ideas presented by the movement. This inconsistency raises questions surrounding movement efficacy. Is this movement exceptionally effective, measured by the broad reach of its message? Or are the messages too simple and straightforward (“buy better food”, “appreciate food more”, “eat a meal with a friend”) for individuals to consider them a part of their identity? Can messages be too simple? Furthermore, if consumers have the same agenda as movements, but simply deny any interest in identifying with a collectivity, can they still be considered a part of the movement?

Looking at the movement as a whole, the leaders advocate consumption as a method of joining the movement. The literature thus far supports the conclusion that this is possible. Consumer activist theory argues that through the social construction of meaning, the role of moral selfing, and economic voting, consumers can indicate their involvement with social movements (Barnett, et al. 2005; Micheletti 2003; Zukin and Maguire 2004; Dickinson and Carsky 2005). Also, theory recognizes that without a collective identity, movements do not actually exist; creating and sustaining a collective identity is their existential purpose. The consumers in this chapter have explained that generally, they are aware of the information disseminated by the movement. Empirically, though, these consumers have no interest in playing the role of the activist and joining a collectivity. Instead, they are simply active consumers. The distinction lies in the consumer desire to remain aware of the ethical and

moral implications of what they consume but lacking in any desire to identify with a broader group. Unfortunately, though, given that this is a relatively new movement, the question of whether consumption can sustain a movement as the main tactic for participation remains unanswered.

CHAPTER 4: BUYING MORE THAN JUST FOOD

I think that before I started working on farms I had a more ideological view of farmers and farms...like the red barn and the fields. (Chelsea, consumer)

Despite often citing personal reasons for their shopping, made clear by the previous chapter, consumers also spend significant amounts of time considering the farmers—their motivations, their lifestyles, and their farms. While consumers are shopping for goods, they also buy an ideal: a personalized, romanticized “farmer,” working on a similarly idealized “farm.” This ideal is constructed as a foil to the image of industrial agriculture, in part from cultural touchstones like overalls, tin buckets, black and white spotted cows grazing pastorally on beautiful verdant fields, and large farmhouses, and in part as a response to huge monocultures, an intense focus on profits, and food crisscrossing the globe. As this chapter will reveal, farmers’ market merchandise is imbued with symbolic meanings, some of which is jointly constructed by consumers and vendors, that transform the cross exchanges of the marketplace into emotionally and politically fulfilling experiences. Interviews have revealed that the ideals on which the symbolic meanings are based are counter-factual. This ideal that consumers envision does not and cannot possibly exist.

Looking more specifically at the farmers’ market, previous research has only begun to understand that consumers who shop at the farmers’ market describe emotional connections to the consumption space. The research has registered the emotions, however, the research is lacking in its further elaboration and construction of the individualization of these ideals. Holloway and Kneafsey’s (2000) research describes the market as an “alternative” space of consumption that reminds consumers of “rustic...Merrie England.” They argue that many

consumers use the markets to fulfill a broader sense of nostalgia. Parkins and Craig (2009) studied a market in New Zealand and found that although many shoppers experience “joy, interest, surprise and gratitude,” their research simply registers the existence of happiness. The authors call the farmers’ market an “affective space” which revolves around a perceived sense of “community”. The affective nature of this space allows consumers to develop their sense of themselves, called moral selving. In terms of consumer studies, this has become known as consuming ethically. Parkins and Craig (2009) have considered the highly personal nature of this. The farmers’ market offers an “ethical subjectivity,” whereby consumers can actualize their own ethics and morals.

In the literature, many authors describe the farmers’ market as important because of the “community” it creates (Kloppenber, et al 1996; Hinrichs 2003; Gasteyer, et al. 2008; Hinrichs 2000); in my interviews, most consumers denied any broader sense of community or attachment. Instead, interviewees described positive emotions at the farmers’ market; when asked more probing questions, the consumers outlined an idealism not characterized by a specific image, but by how “alternative” the farmers and farms at the farmers’ market were. The farmers are perceived as alternative for a variety of reasons; however, one of the prevailing reasons involved the motivation of the farmers. Shoppers distinguish farmers’ market farms from other farmers as not debased by profit-based motivations. Instead of offering a large-scale departure from previous research, my analysis deepens our understanding of consumer shopping, with challenges to a few specific ideas in the already existing literature. This chapter will build on the literature by exploring what is making the consumers feel so happy and how the consumers perceive the farmers. While consumers

emphasize different aspects of the bucolic fantasy, considered together, their comments offer a description of the shared “perfect” farmer.

Uninformed Idealism

Consumers who are relatively uninformed about how exactly the farmers live and grow the food they sell propagate an idealism growing from the pages of books by Pollan and Schlosser and the movie, *Food, Inc* as they envision the lifestyle of the farmers. The factory farm, demonized by numerous authors, is a place of evil in the eyes of shoppers because of its association with animal cruelty and profit hungry corporations. One consumer, Amir described his perception of large farms. Despite his neophyte status at the farmers’ market—Amir has only been shopping at the market for a couple of months—the images of the factory farm have reshaped his vision of what a grocery store farmer looks like: “But now you read all these books about the food industry and corporation and they have, you know, hundreds of acres of farmland to produce like one crop just for money because they have a contract with some grower, or, you know, corporation.” These farmers are unappealing; they grow one group, just for the money. The emphasis on “money”, “contracts”, “corporations”, and “industry”, especially with the disparaging tone used by Amir, indicates that he finds this profoundly unappealing. The image of endless fields of corn is much less attractive, dehumanized, and unromantic, especially when compared with rolling hills full of a large variety of produce.

However, farmers at the farmers' market are perceived as better because they are different. Amir recounted a vision of a farmer at the farmers' market as someone who is "stereotypically [working] on the land, tending to the land." Farmers at the farmers' market reach back into history, Amir explained: "when I go to the farmers' market it goes back to what I, you know, think a farmer used to be. Like back in the day. Like before all this industry came." Farmers' market farmers are just that—farmers, people—instead of businesspeople. Much of this is due to their small scale. Amir explains that in his mind, these farmers farm on "Definitely smaller land plots I assume," and therefore they are much more accessible: "I get a more homey feeling I'd say. Like I could go to the farm and go pick it [produce] if I wanted to. It wouldn't be like in the middle, in the Midwest on a giant acre farm." When compared with the big farms, the farmers offer more of everything he wants: smaller scale, increased homey-ness, and greater accessibility. The word "homey" is very important, as it denotes the increased emotional connection with the farms and farmers at the market. While the massive farms are completely unapproachable, the small scale of the farmers' market farms makes them easy to imagine. Amir's preference for these small farms stems from their physical accessibility—he could conceivably drive to them and find what he's looking for. For Amir, the perceived scaled down size and increased accessibility, juxtaposed with the big farms of the midwest is a core part of the value he sees in farmers' market farmers. The farmer at the market is small, approachable, and has alternative non-monetary motivations.

Another consumer described a similar vision: a perfect farmer, motivated by intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. Here we see the counter-factual nature of this idealism

revealing itself. Despite having no sense of how large the farms are, Phil articulated his idealistic vision based on the inspiration for the farmers:

I don't know what the size of these are but one would assume that they have to be of a size that allows them to, I assume, have a limited employee base and have enough of a crop. I don't think anybody's going to get rich. I don't think that's the motivation for being in the business.

While Phil's conceptualization does partially reflect reality—that farmers would be unable to pick all of the produce they grow—he glosses over the implications. While he commented that these farmers probably will not get rich, the leap from this opinion to making broader conclusions about their motivations is a large leap, indeed. Later in the interview, Phil explained that for farmers, “their purpose is sustainability.” This raises the question of what, exactly, sustainability means. Phil explained, later. Recognizing that farming is difficult, Phil said “there's got to be some other motivation because it's not the easiest thing in the world, so there's got to be a satisfaction that comes from what they're doing.” In this case, he elevates the farmers, envisioning them as pursuing some higher goal. While many would agree with Phil, that farming “is not the easiest thing in the world”, his conclusion that this broader satisfaction comes from sustainability is conjecture. Yet even so, this noble farmer is a critical element of his imaginings: “the two guys that I'm familiar with seeing at [one of the farm vendors], I don't see them on Wall Street.”

Phil seems to think that because he is unable to envision them in the business world, they must be working for a higher purpose. There is a tension, though, between Phil's personal motivations, and those of his idealized farmer. Recalling what Phil claimed earlier—that he shops at the farmers' market simply because of the quality and not because of any

broader identity with any movement—he imagines these farmers as working for something larger, for a movement, or in the name of sustainability. Despite Phil’s personal and utilitarian shopping desires, he elevates the farmers. Thus, Phil’s romanticism of these farmers seems to steer his judgment of their motivations.

One consumer at Metropolitan expressed a markedly more extreme version of this romanticism. A woman was standing at the organic vendor, looking at golden beets, when she said: “it makes me want to become a farmer. I’m serious. You know that?” The vendor, who happened to be the owner of the farm replied, nonchalantly: “Yeah, everyone should.” This seemed to be just the confirmation that the woman needed, as she explained, “In the new world, everyone will be a farmer.” After talking briefly about the CSA the farm offers, the consumer said thank you and walked away. After taking only a few steps, she stopped to look at rainbow carrots and cauliflower. Staring at the purple carrots with wide eyes she remarked, “it all looks so good! It makes me want to be a farmer.” She decided to buy a bag of rainbow carrots, and explained “I live in [A suburb of Boston] and I don’t have a garden or anything, but I watch what I eat. I’m really careful.” Despite having no experience farming whatsoever, she buys into a romantic notion that farming is inspiring and wonderful. As such, she carries her idyllic vision even further, as she imagines a “new world” where everyone farms. Finally, she seems to think that simply being aware of the food that she eats makes her similar to the farmer, or will make her a better farmer. While this instance offered the only occasion of such a high level of idealism, the roots of the idealism are similar: an appreciation of high quality and exotic produce.

Emotion-Based Idealism

Dean, another shopper, appreciated that the food at the farmers' market offered a departure in the form of quality—the food was much better. Dean explained, “we’ve screwed up our grocery system...we lose so much...freshness and flavor...that really makes a difference to me”. While at first Dean appeared to have a simple explanation for shopping at the market, quality, speaking with him later revealed that he has a much more complicated, more emotional connection to the market, which has been highly informed by his past experiences. Later in the interview, when I asked Dean how the market made him feel, he responded: “It just makes me feel good. It makes me feel like – it makes me feel happy, even if it’s raining, and that’s good.”. Later, he described “weeping because I can’t buy anything and the [farmer] has...eight varieties of eggplant and twelve varieties of peppers and I can’t do anything with it,” because he was traveling. This has a direct impact, also, on his perception of the food he buys. Dean offered a specific example in discussing the apple cider he buys:

In season, I’ll get apple cider. And it’s funny to me because I feel like the apple cider from the market is direct from the producer. It’s the same label that they have at Foodie’s⁷ over here – exactly the same label – and the same as Whole Foods. So, you know, it’s a big producer, but somehow it feels better getting it at the farmers’ market.

This quote reveals a paradox: Dean knows that there is no difference in apple cider, evinced by his recognition of the identical label, yet somehow it feels better to shop at the market.

Not only does he feel better while at the market, but he feels better buying identical products

⁷ Foodie’s is a one-off local supermarket in Boston’s South End. It’s a relatively large, relatively expensive supermarket, similar to Whole Foods Market in many ways.

at the market. This supports the conclusion about the intense emotional power and appeal of the market. However, these comments provoke some important questions: what, exactly, is making him have this intense positive association? What is the root of these emotions, if there even is one? While he struggled to articulate what, exactly the answer was, his quotes later gave what could amount to an answer.

Near the end of the interview, when asking Dean about any family experience farming, he discussed direct experiences on farms as a child, characterized by bucolic hills and beauty, and the role of these experiences in shaping his image of farms today. Dean described his childhood at his aunt's farm: "The way I remember Aunt Elsie's farm and that neighborhood. It was rural. It was rural, and beautiful country...wooden fences that come down to the road." Dean was unique among most of the interviewees precisely because his romantic notions were based on experience. However, near the end of the interview, Dean acknowledged his romanticism, recognizing that there are some very challenging and unappealing aspects of farming, including "trampling through the manure"—something he staunchly refused to do. Dean's childhood farm experience gave him a very particular ideal. Dean decried today's changing landscape: "It was not exurbia. And the fences are not all barb-wire fences." He lamented that it "feels like a way of life that's gone. And it – I miss that." Dean expressed sadness and frustration, yet he continues to shop at the farmers' market. Although Dean's previously discussed market-based happiness remains unexplained, it raises the possibility that perhaps his happiness is rooted in his memories of Aunt Elsie's farm. Perhaps he buys at the farmers' market to establish a closer connection, or to harken back to his childhood,

recognizing that that image is gone, but trying to get as proximate as possible. The farmers' market offers a departure from the "whole distribution system we have created in America."

Another interviewee, Lila, echoed the role of emotions as she explained that the smaller scale of the farmers' market makes her feel better about shopping because of a perceived increase in care. Lila equates the smaller scale with an improvement in quality and imagined it in opposition to carelessness on the big farms:

Just my idealistic little farmer, picking the apples himself, not having a whole field of immigrants picking their oranges and stuff. And you know, not using pesticides, being more organic or you know organic like: low spray or whatever. I guess that would be fine.

While recognizing that she is idealistic, she continues, explaining that the farmer does all of the work himself. She equates immigrants picking produce and that depersonalization with a degradation in quality. Furthermore, she operates under the misconception that food at the farmers' market is "more organic," whereas, in fact, there are no levels of organic. Organic is a dichotomous term; either produce is certified organic, or it is not. She attached an emotional connection to the produce picked by the "immigrants:" "So I guess if they hired like 300 people to do it all the time...They are just hired to pick it [produce] and they don't care about it and it just doesn't make me feel happy." Lila was the only interview to explain exactly what makes her "feel happy" about the farmers' market. It involves having produce picked by someone who cares:

So you're a little closer to the fruit that you are eating. And you know more, you know that it's good quality because somebody else like took the time to tend it, they are not just making like thousands and thousands of trees that

they are picking from that they hire outside workers just to do it, because they need to get apples quickly and cheaply.

Lila's happiness stems from the care given to her produce, which is impacted by having someone else "tend to it." Instead of "quickly" and "cheaply" picking the produce, the produce at the market is of a higher caliber for her. She assumed that in knowing the farmer, seeing them at the farmers' markets, she knows that they care about the produce. In effect, the personalization, meeting the farmers at the market, drives her perceived improvement in quality, giving her an overall happier feeling about her produce and the shopping experience.

Amir also romanticized organic farming. Amir's vision of an organic farmer is even more romantic than the vision of a conventional farmer he shared earlier:

Because organic to me has, not an old fashioned feel, but it feels like the way people farmed before the pesticides and so and so came in, so it feels like it is a more legitimate farming, which feels like there should be fewer machines. But that's not actually how it works, and I know that.

His valuation of farming, placing organic as more legitimate, especially interesting because he recognized that his perception was wrong. For Amir, the legitimacy stems from the use of machinery. Amir believes that if a farmer chose not to use machines, they would be working much harder and therefore, more legitimate. Amir's words offer a window into the paradox that exists: consumers know that they are idealistic, verbalize that they have a romantic vision, yet they know that things aren't the way that they describe, but remain invested in their idealism anyway.

One of the notions most frequently repeated by consumers was an interest in supporting the vendors' families. Emily claimed she did not have any romantic notions about

buying her produce. She emphasized that price was most important, always. She shopped at the farmers' market because often the quality was better, but only bought a few items there. Instead, she described shopping at Trader Joe's and Stop and Shop, and making knee-jerk reactions, sometimes buying organic if it looked good, and was located right next to the other options. She still, however, had negative impressions of the farmers who grow the produce at the supermarket.

When asked about her vision of a farmers' market farmer she struggled to describe a clear vision. She could only offer that the farms were "Not really big...Kind of smaller rather than a huge farm selling to the supermarket...I couldn't really explain to you what I mean by small." This quote reveals her equivocation. She remained unsure of what, exactly, a farm of a farmer at the farmers' market looks like. Recognizing that she cannot clearly imagine the appearance of the farms, Emily focused, instead, on the idea of supporting a family:

Well I like the fact that I am kind of supporting these people that I know...well obviously I don't know... you know I can sort of, when I buy their produce, I'm helping support their families. When you buy something at a supermarket you don't really think of that at all.

Many of the vendor interviews revealed that generally, for the larger farms, the farmers chose not to visit the market. However, Emily believed that the individuals at the markets were either the farmers or their families. For her, the appeal of the farmers market rests in the familiarity and familial nature of the market. While most businesspeople (including those in agribusinesses) have a family, the farmer at the farmers' market is different. The question is why? The answer could be rooted in the romanticism. Consumers romanticize the farmers, imagining that they lovingly tend for each piece of produce they grow and then pick. This is

in contrast to the dehumanized agribusinesses. The connection to a humanized, romanticized family-based farmer is much more appealing.

Vendor Perceptions of Consumer Idealism

While consumers described their own idealism, the vendors noticed it as well. One of the greatest improvements this piece offers is its awareness of the vendor experience. Because of the direct market, producers are highly aware of the buying experience of the consumer. Understanding the vendor perception of the idealism will be instrumental in fully understanding this phenomenon. The vendor experience led them to a variety of opinions surrounding what, exactly, the consumers desired.

One important part of the idealism, despite its absence from many interviews, remains the assumption that the food at the farmers' markets is just always better. One vendor, Martha, explained that consumers are highly demanding. Martha, a new farmer and very small vendor of produce and prepared foods, explained that consumers "want this idealistic vegetable in terms of they're beautiful. They were just picked today. Everything about them is perfect at the lowest possible price when I want them. Where I want them, when I want them." Consumers seek produce that is perfect in appearance, fresh, and inexpensive. The unrealistic and at times frustrating aspect for vendors is the demand for perfection coupled with the demand for low prices—an idealistic demand indeed.

For the baked goods vendors, the idealism effected baking decisions. Barbara, a farmer who also baked as a way of using her extra produce, recognized the familial appeal of

farmers' market goods, particularly of baked goods. In the past few years, Barbara had sold her farm to her son. Since then, he grows the food, and she handles the kitchen and sells the products at the markets. Despite most consumers connecting with the farmer through produce, she opined that consumers have an even more intimate connection with baked goods: "I think that a lot of it is that grandmother thing. Mother's pie has a big thing going there. I mean where do you find a strawberry rhubarb pie?" She explained that they sell the most strawberry rhubarb pie, which she argues is because of an emotional, maternal association consumers have with rhubarb pie. She sees it as a type of pie unadulterated by the likes of Mrs. Smith, a pie unavailable at one of the big grocery stores. When asked if she strives for the perfection described as tantamount to high sales and prices typifying produce selling, Marge explained: "No I don't seem to have that problem because I make square cookies and round cookies and one week if it's too hot they're a little flatter or a little squarer, people still buy them." In fact, it is advantageous to have imperfect pies, as it contributes to the maternalized, small-scale, local identity.

The same family aspect came through with the other baker, Marge. Marge discussed her longer term customers, explaining "We make our longtime customers feel like they're part of the family." Marge was very conscious of her customers, the impact of her personality, and the maternal aspect described by Barbara. The major distinction, though, is that Marge seems to focus more on the regular customers, instead of the occasional customers.

Another vendor, Ann, described the role that she plays as a conduit, helping consumers get closer a large-scale idealism and fulfill a desire to increase proximity to their food. The vendor, Ann, described a relationship that she believes consumers are purchasing:

I'm not saying [consumers] will come by if I have really crappy cheese and they won't come by just because they love Ann. But they want to be a part of the story. They want to support that. A lot of it is because they don't have that parents farm or that grandparents farm.

While Ann's ideas were certainly unique in their intensity, the heart of her argument remains that consumers have become increasingly separated from their food, and they are seeking to change this, just as the movement claims to do. Later, she elaborated with broader claims about all of humanity:

But I think that we, as humans, we [need to] have that connection to our basic needs. We don't realize it but I think it's something inside of us. But for a lot of people, we, as farmers' market vendors, we're that connection to something that's very basic in us that a lot of people don't get to experience or have that direct connection to. So we, as the farmers' market vendor, become that connection, that root to the soil, that we, as humans, all have inside of us.

Recognizing that a simple connection or affection toward her will not sell cheese, she explored the idea of a narrative. Ann has worked in the business for many years, at the markets as well as in the fields and in the kitchen, and she has a strong family history in farming; both her parents and grandparents were farmers. Unfortunately, verifying the universality of the desire to have a connection to our "basic needs," that "root to the soil," remains impossible. Despite this, her extensive experience with farms, and markets, does increase her credibility. Also important to recognize, though, is that her extensive family history with farming could bias her glorification of farmers, leading her to aggrandize their role. Thus, the value of Ann's comment is not in the generalizability, or broad-reaching implications, as in its ability to further explain, complicate, and deepen the understanding of the farmer/consumer relationship.

Another vendor, Barbara, elaborated on the idea of a narrative, in explaining that she felt the need to entertain visitors to her farm. Barbara, a farmer who found that some consumers were willing to drive out to her farm offered a comparison to Disney: “You try and get them a Disney experience by sunset [laughs]. You need to give them a Disney experience.” This quote indicates that while consumers are interested in learning more about the farms, and getting a clearer picture of where their food is coming from, they also need something more. Disney’s pristine, fairy tale like simulated environments are appealing, and Barbara perceives the customers as wanting something similar. Her use of the word “need” indicates that she feels a certain pressure to deliver, a revealing commentary on the consumers’ demands. While consumers are interested in learning about the farm, they want it to all be interesting and attention-grabbing. The chasm, however, that exists between the Disney version of farming (pastoral, relaxing fields, and very basic, but fresh, food) and the authentic farm actually experienced by farmers (hard work, difficult pesticide decisions, economic imperatives, and imperfect produce) is enormous.

One prepared foods vendor, Jim, found that many customers are worried about nutrition, often with similarly unrealistic ideals. His product contained a few superfoods, blueberries and açai, and consumers think that it could be the ticket to perfect nutrition and healthfulness: “They [consumers] expect food to be a silver bullet to health, so they will say açai for instance. ‘ If I take that, I’m going to feel better’ ...They want something that is easy and painless and will cure everything—all their ailments.” Few of the vendors struggle with this, because few of them can make health claims. However, Jim has introduced a product that is riding a larger nutrition wave, instead of the “buy local” wave. While his product is

produced locally, and he describes how excited consumers become when they hear the name of the town where he manufactures it, the packaging and information he distributes with the product focuses on its healthfulness, instead of its localness. In this respect, he faces a facet of idealism that differs from personality and farmer romanticism.

Better Informed, Mitigated Idealism

While the intensely idealistic consumers make up a sizable percentage of the farmers' market shoppers, some naïve consumers had idealism that was more closely linked to the realities of farms and farmers. For one consumer, her vision of the idealism involved recognition of the challenges posed by organic farming, and a wish, or hope, that the farmers are relatively careful. Rachel recognized that organic has its challenges, specifically that it can be expensive:

Well, again, if it's organically grown, than it's all well and good, because they are definitely supporting and helping the green earth environment. But I don't know. That's a Catch-22 question. Because some of them, I know for the poorer farmers, I don't know if they necessarily feel that they can always be environmentally conscious. But I mean, overall, I hope that they're being environmentally conscious. Especially for the produce that is? in our stomachs. My goodness! I would hate to think what's going into them.

The tension in this comment, between Rachel's desire to have pesticide free food, for its healthfulness, and her recognition of the challenges that farmers face, is at the heart of the issue for well-informed consumers: deciding between hard work and machine-based, pesticide-ridden efficiency. Rachel is able to separate her desire for healthful produce from what farmers need to continue to exist.

One of the best-informed consumers, Christine, had some real-world experience with farmers and/or farming, and described a more pragmatic vision of the farmer. Christine, a woman with a piece of land that her family had been farming for multiple generations, knows many farmers and compares them to struggling artists:

The farmers I know, it's a little bit like the people I know trying to make a living in the arts. It's a horrible way to live but they do it because they wouldn't do anything else. That's not what's behind the agribusiness in California and Wisconsin, and you know, the places where they're really doing it to make a lot of money.

Later in the interview, again, she underscored that agribusinesses are all about money, "like any other industry," while farmers do their job because of a certain calling. Christine disparages the agribusiness, while elevating the farmers; she has greater respect for the farmers, feeling their reason for working is much nobler. While this opinion is far from unique, her connection to the arts leads her to a perception of farmers as people who have no real choice in their livelihood. Later in the interview, she elaborated:

They [local farmers] really want to do this. They want to do this more than anything else. And they're willing to really accept quite a lot of hard work and inconvenience and not much money and a lot of other stuff that most people really don't want to put up with.

Despite the fact that agribusinessmen also work on the land, and despite not knowing anyone in agribusiness, she characterizes the agribusinessmen as a dehumanized, profit-motivated enemy. In contrast, she depicts local farmers as engaged in honorable labor" working hard, pursuing their passions, doing the work that needs to get done. She admiringly discusses how important their work is. When talking about the small farmers, Christine took on a quieter, more respectful tone, whereas in discussing the agribusinesses, she was much more

reproachful. Christine explains that all local farmers are forced to work much harder, with much smaller profit margins because of the subsidies from the Farm Bill. She argues that this enormous challenge deters all of the individuals easily dissuaded from farming, leaving only the truly passionate. Recalling the idealism of the consumers with little to no experience farming, Christine's idealism contains greater nuance because she recognizes the challenges: hard work and limited choice.

Chelsea, a nutrition student, exhibited similar rationality in her discussion of farmers and their relationship to the land. When I asked her to describe her vision of a farmer, she explained the following, with the caveat that this vision was of a local farmer, not a large-scale farmer: "In most cases, I think of someone who is a steward of the land, or trying their best to be a steward of the land. They're not all the way there on the continuum of sustainability. No one wants to beat the crap out of their soil. (Laughing)." Chelsea is married to a farm-worker with whom she shares aspirations of eventually owning their own farm. She studies farms and food policy and explained that the idea of a "steward" is important. She rooted her imagined scenario in realism, recognizing the romanticism of the notion of perfect sustainability, but articulates an idealistic vision, nonetheless, of a farmer who cares about the earth and his or her soil. While it is logical that a farmer would want to maintain a modicum of care for his or her soil, Chelsea's vision of a "steward" implies much greater responsibility, and a noble vision similar to Christine's. Instead of emphasizing the logic, that farmers care about their soil because they need to have healthy soil to continue growing, she discusses farmers as having a greater respect for their soil. The emphasis on respect and stewardship signifies idealism, despite the founding of these ideas on logic.

Vendor-Perpetuated Idealism

Farmers not only see themselves embodying many of the ideals that the consumers describe, but they also perpetuate the consumers' idealism by aggrandizing their own experiences and lifestyles. Asking the farmers about their history and past involvement with farming will provoke most of them to launch into their respective long family histories.

Barbara described the sacrifices her husband made to be a farmer:

My husband has had the farm for years. He bought it as a teenager. He'd had an accident. A car had hit him while he was riding his bike around the 202 and he was in a coma for five days or something...when he got insurance money from that he bought the farm...his uncle had owned it before that and his uncle had passed away and so he bought the farm.

In telling this story, Barbara spoke with intense deference and respect. She recognized how serious this coma was, and the enormity of the decision to buy a farm instead of something impulsive, as many other teenagers would probably have done: "Not too many teenagers would buy the farm if they got that money today they'd go out and buy probably the fastest and biggest car that they could." She explained that it was work to build the farm to its current status, and described it step-by-step:

And when his uncle had bought it, it was just a farm and he had grafted [planted] just the apple trees out and the pastures and started the farm, and then Bill enlarged on it and put in the other kinds of fruits: the blueberries, the raspberries, blackberries, peaches, plums, a lot of different varieties of plums.

In many ways, this family history is very close to the vision described by many of the consumers. The farm has been in the family for a long time. Furthermore, Barbara's

discussion about family, nature, and hard work with rose-colored glasses further reveals her romanticism of her own life.

Marge, another baker at the market, told a similar yet even more romantic story about the familial nature of the farm. The story she told, one often heard around the farmers' market, was about consumers who described feeling sick of their current work inspiring a desire to try something new: "My son in law Jim was a Stop and Shop manager and got burnt out and now he takes care of the kids and takes care of the orchard." She really enjoyed telling the story, seeming very proud. The more she told, the more it became clear why:

The farm is still sort of a central core of our family... And it's stayed in the family even with the death of my husband. My daughter and son-in-law took over the farm when my husband died and I've just continued to now I'm an employee instead of a farm owner and that seems to work for all of us and I have two son in laws and a son that are directly involved with the farm so that that makes me feel good. You know my daughters go off and work, and the men stay home and do the farm work (laughing).

Just as some of the consumers describe their idealism through fantasies of working outside, off of the land, away from their desks, this farm is a result of following that impetus. And they were successful. If anything, this offers evidence supporting the point that it is possible to migrate from business to agriculture. Furthermore, if a family makes this decision, the farm can become the nucleus for the family—a powerful and intoxicating notion, indeed. When juxtaposed with the idealism described by the consumers, the consumers' bucolic imaginings' do not seem quite so unrealistic.

Stephen, one of the larger farmers at the markets, confirms the consumers' perceived sense of the familial nature of being a farmer at a farmers' market:

A lot of sacrifices have been made personally and business wise. So we try to support a farmer who's coming up and we'll try to support him by often times telling consumers to go check other farmers and see what they have and sending them over. Support them by the fact that they have a market that they can come to, because in some cases we started off when we had to make it happen. So they had this key element where they have a market that's already up and running. So they have a source.

While in many businesses, similar behavior would be business suicide, Stephen has a broader focus. He will send customers to different vendors because by doing so, he not only shares the wealth, but also helps to ensure the future of markets and the presence of a variety of vendors. While the consumers focus on their own relationship with the vendors, Stephen's emphasis on the vendor-vendor relationship offers an example of another idealized aspect of the market: the vendor camaraderie. Stephen elevates himself, saying that he tries to share the wealth, instead of competing, reinforcing this non-competitive part of the idealism.

In a conversation with a prepared foods vendor at the market one day, she explained that she likes to embody the movement, herself. While most of the vendors back a truck up to their respective tents, this vendor was different. Instead, behind her booth was a bicycle with an eight-foot long flat metal trailer attached to it. When I asked her what it was for, she explained that she worked for a company that believed strongly in sustainable practices. The factory was only a few miles away, and despite the fact it was a "very slow ride" and "very difficult," she avoids driving a car as much as possible and sees riding a bicycle as her way to embody the ideals of the company. This vendor lived the ideal, and talked about it extensively, glorifying herself and, by association, the company she worked for.

A baker, Kathleen, used the word “love” to describe her relationship with her work. Kathleen spoke invoking usually usually absent from profession descriptions: “That’s what our heart is. We love to be a bakery. We love to make things from scratch: everything from your bread to your cakes, to your wedding cakes. We make it ourselves, that’s the where the love is.” Here is an example of a baker elevating herself, trying to further construct the idealism of the consumers. She also used a highly emotional word, “love,” to describe her work. This provides evidence that sometimes, perhaps the ideal sprouts from the vendors. As Kathleen further explained, of herself and her business partner, “We didn’t go into it to make money, we went into it to be able to create...I wanted to make the world a better place, one pastry at a time.” Alongwith the consumer, Kathleen has a relatively romantic vision of the work that she performs. While the movement emphasizes the macro instead of the micro, Kathlees believes that she can enact change, however small, with each pastry she makes and/or sells.

Kathleen further elaborated on her relationship with the customers, justifying her relationship to them. Kathleen discussed how unrealistic this idealism is:

I mean every customer that comes in here thinks that I’m the baker. And every single person at a farmers’ market goes “so you made this?” And I smile and say ‘Yes.’ Because yes, I have baked that. Do they honestly think that I’m working a twelve hour shift at the farmers’ market, and then having worked the twelve previous hours baking everything for them? It’s not doable, but it is a small community that does it. I know very well the baker that’s doing it. You can ask me about any product that I make, and I’ll tell you what it is, because I’ve had that experience. And they like being able to say that’s Kathleen, she’s the baker.

In this case, she is perpetuating the idealism. Instead of explaining to the consumers that she does not bake every single item, she lets the consumers maintain the vision of her as a baker.

She recognizes that the consumers are buying into an identity and chooses not to challenge the consumers' need for a personal connection to the baker. She justifies this manipulation of the consumer by omission, saying that she has had, at some point in time, the experience of baking the items that they ask her about.

Having enumerated the multifarious consumer notions of what each respective idealized farmer looks like, these images than be conjoined. Taking all of the ideas from every consumer, a composite, shared, concrete image of the farm and farmer emerges. This farmer is very similar to the farmers of yesteryear. There is no machinery on this farm. The farmer does all of the work himself without any help from immigrants. He lives on a small, approachable farm, with a red barn on his property. He has a small family and they are all happily engaged in farm life. The farm is the center of their family because the farmer is very passionate about his work. There is no other career, besides farming, that he considered, and he certainly has no profit motivations whatsoever. The work that he engages in is deeply satisfying, because he carries it out with a sense of purpose. He works in the name of a noble goal: sustainability. In fact, the farmer would be very uncomfortable if surrounded by the morally debased individuals who work hard for money on Wall Street. He is of a higher moral caliber than the so-called "farmers" who run the big farms in the Midwest, the farms owned by corporations. He is a decidedly happy person, and the farm has a happy aura which pervades the property; this is because he is very close to the earth with which he works. The fruits of his labor are delicious foods that are some of the healthiest foods that can be purchased anywhere, certainly far superior to that which is available at the grocery store. The food is beautiful and amazingly cheap. When the farm sells produce at the market, the

money goes directly towards the family. In fact, the money from the market goes straight home to the family and it makes them happier.

This emerging portrait, a synthesis of opinions by consumers and vendors, shows that part of the farmers' market is not only about buying produce, but about goods imbued with symbolic meaning and value. This deepens the understanding offered by previous work by creating a specific, imagined farmer that shoppers at the market are consuming, regardless of its counter-factual nature. While at its most basic level, shopping the farmers' market is a transactional relationship. While consumers exchange money for produce, they are buying into an idea that is much grander than simply sustenance. They have endowed simple purchases of produce, and sometimes baked goods, with much greater significance. This provides them with a greater emotional connection to their food and a more satisfying feeling of contributing to something larger. These farmers are then responsible for upholding this ideal. While often they do with little effort, evinced by their self-descriptions, living up to the exceptionally romantic notions that blanket the shopping experience for so many consumers can be a tall order, indeed.

CHAPTER 5: STRUGGLING WITH CONSUMER IDEALISM: THE VENDOR SIDE

We make anything fresh that we can. But with the quantity of the stuff, I mean, you couldn't pick 500 pounds of blueberries a week. You just couldn't. And strawberries and raspberries.

Despite Marge's desire to live a life that follows consumers ideal notions of farmers, her attempts to bake all of her goods with hand-picked produce that goes straight from the tree or shrub into the kitchen to be baked and sold almost immediately, is not possible. In fact, the very popularity of her product, as homemade and less-than-perfect, has forced her to scale up and has forced her to look outside of her family farm for berries. The story that emerged from Marge, one of limitations and challenges, became the norm among the vendors, instead of the exception. Recognizing the power of the idealism to sell products, when in front of the consumers, vendors strove to meet consumers' expectations. However, when I interviewed them without consumers present, vendors took a decidedly different tone.

At the beginning of every interview, I made sure to explain to vendors that I had an enormous amount of respect for them, because of the hard work required for their profession. While at first the vendors seemed taken aback, they would generally utilize the interview as an opportunity for them to explain the difficult realities they face. Foregoing their efforts at living up to consumer ideals, they outlined a profession wrought with the challenges, limitations and frustrations faced by all small businesses. Covering the vendor's side of the shopping experience, this chapter elucidates that while consumers idealize vendors in diverse

ways, depending on the vendor's occupation—baker, produce farmer, prepared-foods chef, dairy farmer, or meat farmer—in most cases consumer idealism creates unfulfillable romantic and bucolic ideals. Vendors struggled with the idealistic expectations to varying degrees, most chose to focus on the business aspect of their farmers' market enterprise. Some vendors became intensely emotional, even going so far as to use expletives in their anti-idealism speeches, while the majority of the vendors kept their composure, utilizing an impassive demeanor and vocabulary to describe the challenges they face. This chapter will first develop an understanding of the realities vendors face, recognizing the departure from the idealism. Later it will explore how vendors address the unrealistic demands of consumers.

This chapter will begin with one particularly poignant story of a vendor named Ann who seemed to battle the idealism. Ann calls herself a dairy farmer; she makes and sells cheese. She expressed her frustration with consumer idealism, utilizing a specific example that had reduced her to tears at the farmers' market one day. Having farmed for decades, Ann grew up on a family farm, upon which suburbia eventually encroached. She told the story of a book that came out during the summer of 2009 and was discussed on National Public Radio. She explained that the author, "a writer for New York City, is fulfilling his dream of owning a farm and milking animals, so he milks [a few]. And someone always takes care of them while he's doing his book tour promoting his book that he wrote. And he writes about how easy it is to make cheese." She became enormously frustrated at the oversimplification and lack of respect in the eyes of the consumers. Day after day, "people come to me and say, 'well it must not be that hard what you do.'" One day at the market, she lost control and "I was just in tears." She was angry and frustrated. In response to the

consumer lack of respect and appreciation, she said “what I want to say is ‘Fuck you.’” While she explains that she would never say this to a consumer, the idealism can be suffocating. In some ways, the unrealistic expectations seem even harder than the very work that she carries out on a daily basis--waking up early, working with live and potentially uncooperative animals, and relying on nature. The consumers have little recognition of this hard work. For Ann, this provoked a wide variety of emotions.

Another vendor, Kathleen, explained in a matter-of-fact tone that consumers romanticize the baking profession, imagining it to be easy. Consumers “think that they can just come in and learn and bake anything and it will be just playing around with blueberries.” Kathleen speaks of consumers who imagine that baking in a bakery is like baking at home. She explained that there is one big difference: scale. She wants to appear approachable and small-scale—she tells customers she bakes all of products herself, yet employees at Kathleen’s bakery move 50-lb sacks of flour and sugar, and “they [employees] come in and they work hard. We produce 1000 cookies in a day and then you have to freeze them or sell them and it’s a very physical job.” At home, the small scale of baking makes it fun and easy, and the product is enjoyed by friends, family, or given as a gift. While Kathleen wouldn’t tell the consumers that she has a staff that helps her bake her cookies, she self-identifies as very hard-working, despite the consumer romanticism.

Kathleen explained that she had her own idealistic notions of farmers when she started at the farmer’s markets only two years ago; however, she had these ideals challenged when she first began at the market. In her words,

That was a rude awakening, because that was my impression, first year we were at the farmers' markets, I was like "Oh my God, these people are not like peace and love, and let's all have organic tomatoes." You know, it's a business, it's the way people make their livelihood. And it's serious, you don't cross them.

While Kathleen is a baker and feels the impact of the idealism, she perpetuates it herself, evidenced by this quote. She is guilty of the same romanticism for which she faults her customers. She explained that she had encountered worries from other vendors that she would cut into their respective business. Whereas she originally imagined that the other vendors would welcome her warmly. Instead they responded inimically to her joining the imagined "community."

Despite Kathleen's experience, there was a certain amount of camaraderie between the vendors. During multiple observations I noticed some of the vendors walking around to the other vendors, the farmers to the baked goods vendors and vice versa, sometimes offering trades and sometimes offering to buy the products outright. Whenever money changed hands, the vendors always made deals and gave discounts. In one case, one of the produce vendors bought some jelly, "for his girlfriend," and Marge commented on how cute it was and offered not to charge him. She said that she appreciated his friendship, and even offered to put a special label on it. In this way, the vendors are closer to the "peace and love" ideal described by Kathleen. This reveals that while a certain amount of competition exists between them, as they need to make money to survive as a business and as people, there is also a certain sense of camaraderie.

The Reality/Ideal Gap

“Organic” is one of the words that has an entire way of life associated with it that consumers dream about and pursue. However, one vendor, Barbara, discussed how growing produce in an “Organic” way is, in fact, significantly more complicated and challenging than it appears. Consumers see the result of a long and complicated process: a green and white USDA emblem, which says “USDA ORGANIC” and “CERTIFIED ORGANIC.” What they miss, though, is the work leading up to that certification. Barbara discussed the process of organic certification: “Oh organic you have to go so many years. I think it’s six years where there is nothing on it at all [as in spraying the produce with any pesticides].” This is a long process, requiring great expense and great risk. During the six year process, farmers cannot claim organic, but must adhere to its rules. Furthermore, during and after that process, many consumers would be amazed to learn that despite what appears at the supermarkets, most of the organic produce is less attractive: “As far as orchards, I don’t know anybody who has done organic that doesn’t have scabbed and different stuff, you know. It’s harder to go organic on tree roots than it is on low crop, vegetables.” Having seen her friends make this switch, Barbara is able to penetrate the idealism and see the reality: organic farming offers rewards in the form of increased prices, but also has much more expensive inputs. The reality of becoming organic has a particularly demanding waiting period. During the risky, long, expensive process to reach certification, vendors are organic but not certified, and cannot yet offer their produce at the high prices certified organic can command. Barbara encapsulates the plight of the organic farmer—the large risks necessary and the challenging work, both of

which must occur to meet consumer demands—the same fate faced by the rest of the vendors at the market.

Later in the discussion, Barbara explained that an organic vendor with some of the most attractive, perfect looking produce in the whole market had an enormous amount of waste. Despite only one vendor mentioning it, Barbara's explanation reveals yet another aspect of the reality faced by all the vendors:

And from what I've heard we have an organic on the right next to us at the market here. And they have beautiful produce! But I've heard him say that you just don't see what they throw away. You know in order to get that percentage of perfect food, there's a lot of waste! So I don't see people accepting the blemishes they expect perfect everything.

While the organic vendor had some of the most beautiful produce at the market, Barbara outlines that this is a façade and that one of the important realities of being a vendor is that not all of the produce grown is perfect. While baked goods do not struggle with this as much because consumers prefer less-than-perfect products, all of the organic farmers face this. For farmers to remain idealistic, they must waste a significant amount of food. While consistently offering the highest quality produce, the waste is hidden from the customers because it is unappealing.

Two other vendors summarized the chasm between the vendors and the consumers. Jess explained that in her case, the farmers would say, “Well, it's not ideal, but that's what we do.” In particular, she was referring to the use of plastic bags during the freezing process, and the energy-intensive process of quick freezing:

“We know that it's a huge energy thing, and it's not the most green that we can do, and the packages can't be recycled, but it's what we can do to offer the best product

right now. So it's things like that. We know it's not ideal. We know it's not the best. We're totally aware of it, but this is why we're doing it."

She explained that farmers need to educate the consumer about the rationale behind their decisions. In exchange, farmers expect that the consumer will be understanding of their challenges and recognize that they are doing the best they can. Stephen agreed, from a produce perspective: "There's all these things that are not idealistic but may be sustainable for the farmer at the time. And that doesn't necessarily always correlate with sustainability as far as environmental or idealism. And that's something that goes very deep." He was referring specifically to the consumer idealism and the grand visions consumers have of the broader purpose of the farmer. Stephen calls into question the whole conception of sustainability, using the word to refer to the ability of the farmer to sustain business, instead of its more common use, for the environment. Of course, the farmers need to consider their own well-being, ensure their own financial survival, lest they be unable to continue to offer produce.

Farming as a Business: Pricing

The consumer demand for both perfect goods and low prices forces the vendors to make a difficult decision: cater to consumers willing to spend extra money to support their ideals, or cut corners, sell a cheaper product, and fail to live up to the ideal. All vendors are forced to make this decision. Jim, one of the prepared food vendors, explained that while he remains aware of the push for local products, he has to consider his bottom line of profitability. Jim's product employs fresh berries, and he explained, "If I go to Canada and

buy wild, organic blueberries I pay a dollar a pound. Huge differences in pricing. And as a small processor, that means a lot. I mean, that's probably make or break for me. Because there is no way I could turn a profit at the cost of \$2.99 a pound for wild blueberries." In this case, the decision is easy for him. While he would prefer to cater to the consumers and offer the the local and wild-picked products they seek, business demands force him to make pricing decisions.

The same applies for the baked goods vendors. Kathleen explained that consumers make the same impossible demand for baked goods. For Kathleen, she found consumers seeking organic products. She explained that "People can say that they love natural or organic til they're blue in the face, but they're not going to pay \$5 for a muffin. So that just means that I should find a product that they will pay for that I can still make the margin that I need to but still use the ingredients that I want to." While consumers seem to have unbounded idealism, vendors recognize that money is a governing factor. This forces her to make products that fall "within a certain price point"; that also provides the consumers with what they want. Unfortunately, in this case, she cannot do this because of cost limitations. In her words, "it stinks." She is frustrated by the situation, but business demands force her to make a decision that is both feasible and profitable.

Another vendor, Ann, describes struggling with the process of pricing; her struggle hinges upon her inability to disengage from her desire to live up to consumer ideals. Ann recognized that consumers want a perfect product that is also cheap. This forces her to balance the necessity of finding a price that will help her bottom line with the desire to provide a perfect product:

They say with pricing you wanna go as high as people will pay, but not go higher than the market can bear. Well what is that!? I've gone to pricing workshops because I'm dying to learn how to do this. And I still don't know how to do this. I'm a farmer, so I tend to keep myself on the low side because I don't think people will pay. I know I'm a cheap person. I say that. So am I going to pay that? No I'm not going to pay that. I end up saying that to myself and I price it so that I would pay it. But I've had to learn to step out of that and know that we have a good product and not be afraid of charging the right amount. And I talk to other producers and I try to be in the ballpark.

She wants to offer her cheese at a high but not too high price, but still cannot seem to figure this out. Her emotional involvement, perhaps because of her connection to her product, to the consumers, and her desire to live up to the consumer ideal, and her inability to price her product objectively makes it difficult for her to make money.

While many of the vendors tried to offer high quality products and push the prices of their products to the upper limits of consumer spending, Marge explained that there is a place for the lower quality produce. One of the vendors near Marge was anomalously cheap. Marge explained that for customers who demanded beautiful and organic produce, there was a vendor, and for customers looking for prices, there is a vendor for that, too. While one of the vendors near her offered organic produce with a high price to match the high quality, some consumers wanted something else: "If you want a bargain, you go to the junk dealer. And sometimes you can't afford the perfect organic thing." Like most businesses, different consumers have different thresholds of what they are willing to spend. For this varying demand, the vendors offer different supply. While Marge does not speak to the success or failure of this vendor, in observations, this vendor was almost never busy, and often took produce home, indicating a decreased popularity, despite the lower prices.

Farming as a Fair Business

An important facet of the consumer idealism is that the farmer is fair, in all senses. Stephen, one of the vendors, established this as one of his guiding principles. When I asked Stephen about the idealism, he did not seem particularly concerned or preoccupied with it. He explained: “Especially with the economy being the way it was, too, fair pricing is key.” He talked about how this past season was especially good for his apple crop and he talked about wanting to “share” the good season with the consumer, offering the best price possible. Stephen aligned his efforts with consumer desires; he identified his goal as earning consumer trust by showing consumers that he would not gouge prices. He wants consumers to “trust on value where they know that we’re not gouging... ‘Well at least we’ll get this strong price and what it is, is what it is.’ So it’s trying to be fair all the way around.” While consumers did not necessarily mention the importance of fairness in interviews, Stephen’s description of his pricing certainly fits into a certain idealism, as this is a large departure from larger corporations and agribusinesses which are more focused on competition and profits.

Another vendor, a meat vendor named Jess, explained that she had a similar goal of fairness and accessibility. She specifically references the avoidance of the “elitism” that accompanies high prices. Jess, who had also spent a significant amount of time working on her stand’s farm, explained that the owners of the farm “Feel really, really, really, really strongly about their meat not being elite. That’s something that’s really, really, really, really important to them.” Within this movement, there are cries that the exorbitant prices have made the movement impenetrable by individuals without large amounts of disposable

incomes (Maloney 2006). Jess is trying to struggle with the stigma associated with the expensive meat, by controlling the meaning that the customers associate with it. Jess explained that the lower pricing has had a negative impact on the profits as a whole: “I think that [the owners] have actually suffered a little bit in their business because they really don’t want their meat to be elite prices...They want it to be consumer available for everybody in a lot of ways.” The owners feel so strongly about their products reputation that they want their meat to be accessible and stigma-free, even if it means sacrificing some of their own profits. While the idealism perpetuated by the movement leaders does not speak about profit motivations and pricing, vendors who feel so passionate about their products that they are willing to sacrifice profits to keep it accessible, would likely appeal to customers. To summarize, Jess explained that the owners “try to be really consumer-based rather than competitive-based.” When Jess says “competitive-based,” she is referring to pricing products in a way that would make the most money. Like Stephen and Ann, the owners want their products to be available to the consumers, instead of yielding as much money as possible.

Behind the Idealistic Façade

When given the opportunity, vendors profess honesty and transparency; however, when goaded, vendors explained that they conceal a variety of unpleasanties from consumers, in the name of meeting customers’ unrealistic expectations. In one of the early interviews, Marge was speaking about the quality of the produce, and the homemade/perfect appearance dichotomy. She was discussing the other vendor, Barbara, and suddenly, she

whispered, “She uses the mixes. And if you look at her products, they look perfect.” When I asked Barbara about her products, she was not the least bit apologetic, though she seemed a bit uncomfortable discussing it. When I pressed her, she explained that a few of her products were prepared with mixes but refused to identify which ones, beyond the brownies. She did not consider it a violation of consumer trust. In fact, after further questioning, even Marge, who had just tattle-tailed, explained that she engaged in the same practices: “The only thing we cheat on are the brownies. And Duncan Hines makes a much better brownie than I can. But that’s the only mix and I know for a fact that the other people are going to the bakery supply places and buying premixed things and they’re gonna come out perfect.” She made a label with the list of ingredients in the mix. She claimed that if customers asked, she would tell them that it was a pre-made mixture, but they never ask, so she never reveals it to them. Having discussed the importance of the grandmotherly identity she assumes, this seems decidedly hypocritical. Based on the assumptions shoppers bring to the market, they would presumably feel betrayed if they knew.

Barbara also explained that the quantity of pies that they sell forces her to freeze them. Again, in this instance, her actions seem to conflict with her identity as a grandmother. Barbara explained, “We do make a lot of pies and we freeze them...and then we bake them off as we need them,” in order to be able to offer pies in the wintertime. While at first this seemed deceptive, since customers were expecting freshly baked pies, she rationalized it by saying “it’s only being frozen once,” with emphasis on the “once.” She explained that it was all rather simple: “If you bake them off and freeze them...you tend to get a soggy bottom crust.” While this seems like less of a betrayal than the use of mixes, the

scale of her operation, the image of pies sitting in freezers still seems like it would have a negative effect on consumer perceptions, if they were aware of it.

Despite these lies by omission, Barbara engages in acts of charity that rival those of Whole Foods Market. While consumers never discussed the idea of farmers giving to charity in their idealism, Barbara explained that her farm has found a use for their excess produce. They give it to a nonprofit organization that “does a lot of dinners for shut-ins and handicapped people who can’t get out of their house.” Barbara explained that she gives to the charity regularly, “Three or four times a year.” They give on a grand scale, offering produce for “850 people.” Barbara provides “berries, blueberries...peaches and plums...blackberries, which was a treat for them because there aren’t many people who have blackberries.” Barbara described this with excitement and engagement. Surprisingly, though, she did not mention that this was a major part of her advertising. While companies like Whole Foods Market advertise their civic engagement extensively, with their campaigns about “whole people, whole planet” (Johnston 2007) Barbara chooses not to. In this example, juxtaposed with WFM, Barbara seems to be altruistic, instead of profit-hungry.

Struggling With Movement Demonization

For another vendor, Jess, being in the meat business, an industry demonized by the New Food Movement, has forced her to cope with this demonization, or New Food Movement fallout. Jess explained that while *Food, Inc.* was very important for the awareness it spread surrounding the mistreatment of animals, it also changed consumer perceptions of

meat more broadly. The visceral images had a lasting effect: “Those images have been burned into some people’s brains.” Thus, Jess needed to work hard to counter these images: “having images of cows roaming free on the hillside gives sort of the sense of assurance to people.” Jess describes the owners of the farm as “two of the best farmers I’ve ever met in my entire life. They really know what they’re doing, and I think that’s really comforting for people.” To combat the images of *Food, Inc.*, and the *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, two negative ripple-effects resultant from the force of the movement, Jess explained that the owners will be purchasing a digital picture frame for their booth in order to show images from their farm “of healthy farming with animals.” Buying the digital picture frame is an easy decision; it is “cheap item you can buy at Staples that looks good in their booth.” She explained that the goal of conveying the animal treatment at their farm as ethical was paramount. When I asked her whether this was too much technology, and if perhaps consumers would recoil, as it conflicts with the farmer identity, she assured me that the owners “live a very farmer life, with everything that you think that’s ideal about farmers. They’re not that technologically great at computers and stuff like that.” She explained that the digital picture frame helped them communicate their message that the animals on this farm are different from all of the other animals. While the New Food Movement has effectively demonized the giant feedlots, Jess’s struggle indicates that the Movement has failed to fully elevate the animal farmers in the same way it has produce and dairy farmers.

A produce vendor, Stephen, echoed Jess’s desire to correct the misconceptions of the consumers. Consumers believe that organic means pesticide-free. Instead, “The big distinction is organic means they can use a pesticide but it can’t be a manmade pesticide. So

they can use a naturally occurring pesticide which can be nicotine. It can be a sulfur product.” He explained that, “A lot of people think that organic means no pesticides. I just try to subtly remind them that they should prepare, take care of anything whether it’s organic or not. Wash it because there’s a good chance it has a pesticide on it.” Stephen tried to be as “fair and honest with the consumer” as possible. He explained that he felt that through the New Food Movement, the organic industry had misled consumers, making them believe that organic meant completely free from pesticides. Though, he talked about consumer frustration when prodded to let go of preconceptions surrounding organic products, he still works hard to have as open a dialogue as possible, to engender trust with the consumer.

The Bigger Goal: Understanding and Appreciation

In face of the idealism perpetuated by the consumers, vendors are stuck between fully explaining the hard work required by their professions, and living up to the consumers’ unrealistic expectations. When given the opportunity to speak candidly about their work, many of the vendors explained the challenges they face in their job. While all wanted appreciation for the hard work their job demands, only a few seemed perturbed by the consumers. Barbara explained that while many consumers believe the farmers have no work during the winter, they are wrong:

They don’t even realize how much work goes into[farming]....that you work year round, that you work...and a lot of people think that a lot of apple growers go to Florida for the winter. They don’t realize that it takes all winter to prune the trees and then in the spring you start to spray or use alternative methods which we are. [We use] IPM which is integrated pest management.

Barbara proudly communicates that she uses alternative methods quite often at the market. She also explained that beyond the hard work involved in farming, it also requires a year-round commitment. The reality of farming is that while there is only produce growing, harvesting and farming markets in the spring, summer, and fall, even when the weather gets cold, farms still have to continue pruning the trees and preparing for the next growing season.

Kathleen summed up the broader goal as an issue of respect. She explained that consumers fail to realize the hard work and little money involved: “it’s a lot of really hard work and a low profit job, so you’re not going to make money doing it....That said, they need to make a living at it. They need to be respected.” The idea of respect was echoed by a variety of other vendors. The same could be said about Ann who explained, “My job at the market is to sell cheese, so I don’t go there saying, ‘today I’m going to proselytize about why farmers are important.’ I try to approach it professionally...I want people to see me as a professional.” In both cases, the vendors work hard, with little financial compensation. In exchange for this, they seek respect and recognition of the hard work they endure day after day.

Ann elaborated further, discussing her personal frustrations about consumer idealism. Ann expressed how she felt near the end of the market season: “I’m exhausted, I’m tired, and I’m burned out. It’s October and I’m about ready to strangle every customer that comes in front of me because I’m exhausted and burned out and tired. And you’re telling me it’s easy to make cheese?” The consumers make her very angry. While she described her intense emotion, she talked about how important it was for her to conceal her emotions:

And how do I respond. I have to put a smile on my face. I can't say (yelling) 'this guy is an idiot, let me tell you the real story.' That doesn't sell cheese. It doesn't make me seem professional, or anything else. It ruins the idealism...It makes me feel like [I] am doing all of this for nothing. To me, [the consumer idealism]cheapens what I do, what I know. That's very frustrating for me. Am I meeting someone's idealism? I don't know that I am. Because I think that the ideals...the vision is not the reality. Which, you know, a doctor would tell you the same thing. Well everyone wants to be a doctor, but the doctors who are working in ERs for 12-hour shifts and they're beat, and haven't seen their kids, and go home exhausted and end up in a divorce. Their ideal doctor world isn't really what it is either.

Ann's frustration stems from the lack of understanding from consumers. While consumers fully appreciate her final product, she is frustrated by their lack of knowledge and appreciation of the work required to make cheese. She wants valorization for her hard work, not just her product. This becomes clear in her comparison with doctors, a highly regarded profession of the utmost importance for the functioning of society, with little recognition of the challenges that doctor's face, as a result of their long workdays and intense commitments. Despite all of the challenges and frustrations of farmers, out of all of the interviews, Ann was the only interviewee to express such strong negative feelings about this lack of understanding.

This chapter, as a whole, brings to light the challenges that the idealism has created. While the leaders of the New Food Movement work hard to create visions of romantic farmers that will appeal to customers and inspire a shift in habits, from shopping at the grocery store to shopping at the farmers' market, the ideals remain unrealistically romantic. The visions are completely unattainable. However, vendors still work hard to meet the expectations of consumers because it helps them sell product. The idealism has forced vendors to make a decision, either ruin the customer's ideal perception with reality—

speaking about the hard work— or continue hiding behind the façade created by the New Food Movement. Most of the vendors prefer to hide behind the façade, though they remain exceptionally frustrated by the lack of understanding and appreciation of the work required in small-scale, local agriculture.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

While I began this piece discussing the importance of broad, movement-based analysis, my research elucidated that social movement literature could not fully explain what I was witnessing. Many of the defining aspects of movements—collective identity, collective action, and activism—were completely absent in my interviews with consumers, yet the movement has generated significant energy on television, in books, and in movies. Even those consumers acting in step with movement goals and priorities expressed no sense of collective identity, whatsoever. Social movement scholars offer no label for these collectivity-denying individuals, indicating that movement literature has failed to remain at pace with the rapidly changing social movement landscape. Most of the literature analyzing movements, even the more recent, highly moral-based movements and lifestyle movements (Jasper 1997; Haenfler, et al. 2008) suppose that participation in a movement involves protests, demonstrations, or sit-ins. While the individuals most passionate about this movement engage in eat-ins and protests, the most popular method of participation involves consuming actively. However, consumption is much more individualistic than a protest or a demonstration. As Brown (2010) recognized, simple actions like purchasing products are too small to create a sense of broader collective identity. What is the role of consumers, then?

Looking more broadly at the movement, the disconnect between the movement and the consumers underscores the importance of the following distinction: the difference between consumer activism and active consumption. The word activist has a large variety of meanings, but always denotes participation in a movement. Consumer activism describes an

act, consumption, carried out by an individual. These consumer activists consumer with the expresspurpose of indicating involvement in a movement. This is what is? a way of indicating membership in a collectivity. Active consumption, however, is simply the act of consuming in a way that is aware of what? Active consumers understand the socially constructed meanings and implications of certain purchases, however, these consumers do not necessarily identify with a collectivity. These are the consumers who appear in this thesis. Looking at active consumption and consumer activism, the question remains as to how, exactly meaning and symbolism are constructed.

Consumer studies explains the classification of the desirability of products as part of a symbolic language (Zukin and Maguire 2004). In the case of this movement, an ideal is created by leaders of the New Food Movement. The ideal is the farmer, and all of goods that these farmers sell are elevated to high levels. When visiting the farmers' market, consumers have an opportunity to interact with the movement-aggrandized farmers. The consumers bring their idealistic baggage to the farmers' market, forcing the vendors to grapple with their demands. In response, the farmers struggle with how to cope with the fallout of these ideals: consumers with unrealistically romantic notions of what farming is all about. In many cases, the farmers' perpetuate these ideals, by glorifying their own experiences; most vendors recognize that living up to the ideals will help them sell products. In many cases, the desire to meet consumer expectations leads vendors to construct a façade. In their struggle with the consumer ideals, some of the vendors become intensely angry and frustrated, while others simply address the idealism, gently informing the customers of their ignorance and occasional misunderstanding.

Juxtaposing the individualistic nature of consumption with the broader movement goals reveals that movement leaders are, in effect, constructing a barrier between the movement and the individuals. However, this reveals the paradox: without active consumption, the movement would be unable to exist. The success and reach of consumer activism plays an instrumental role in sustaining the movement by spreading understanding and awareness. Furthermore, despite consumers' denial of identification, their actions support the goals of the movement. However, the nature of consumption still does serve to limit the potential of the movement. If all of the individuals consuming were actually attending protests or demonstrations, as participants have historically, then the movement would be much more successful and impressive.

This thesis is unique in that it is able to explore the impact of consumers on vendors. Given that farmers' market pieces have failed, previously, to consider the role of the vendor, they have missed 50% of the shopping experience. The farmers' market offers a unique opportunity. For precisely the same reason why a direct market offers such an enormous improvement over the grocery store for consumers, it also provides academics the potential to study both sides of the shopping experience. Whereas most shopping dynamics are characterized by consumers purchasing products from an individual who had little to no role in their creation, the farmers market is completely different. For studies of consumerism trying to develop a deeper understanding of direct market consumption, future studies should focus on the sellers just as much as the consumers. At the very least, the sellers need to be consulted about their feelings about the consumers, their reasons for selling, and their overall selling experience. This will transform a unidirectional relationship, making it

multidirectional, involving the perceptions by consumers of themselves, individually and collectively, and the parallel for the vendors.

Causality Behind Movement Involvement Denial

In an effort to explain the staunch denial of movement involvement, a review of the literature reveals a few possible explanations, as movement participation denial has been witnessed in a few different instances. The few authors who have recently written pieces grappling with this topic indicates that the phenomenon of collective identity denial is becoming increasingly commonplace. Bobel conducted research in Australia (2007), where she found that highly engaged movement participants denied the title “activist.” She found that the reasoning was because participants held the term “activist” in high esteem and associated with it a certain perfection, with regard to movement involvement. In terms of the respondents in this thesis, though, Bobel’s explanation seems unlikely because her study revolved around individuals who fully recognized their high level of involvement, but simply avoided a particular label. In the case of my interviewees, individuals did not even consider their actions as related to a movement in any way, whatsoever.

Gamson (2010) considered the impact of the media on decreasing movement involvement. Gamson tries to establish a causal link, proposing that increasingly personalized news is making it impossible for collectivities to emerge. Gamson offers that the enumerable narrative compete, and consumers have little desire to develop a collective, shared experience. This phenomenon loses credibility as an explanation because the respondents in

this thesis claimed that they did not read about the Movement-related issues. Furthermore, Gamson's relatively aged view of what forms movement participation can take—protests, demonstrations and petitions—precludes his theories from applicability to the New Food Movement, as consumer activism is one of the most common ways to join the movement. Today's movements are new and different, and many academics continue to struggle to identify how young generations identify with movement, necessitating the creation of new models and explanations.

The Consumer Idealist and Consumed Ideal

To facilitate greater understanding, I propose a new concept: the consumer idealist. Consumer idealists are those individuals who are either on the fringes of the movement or not involved at all. They only exist in modern movements, specifically those movements where consumer activism is offered as one method of becoming involved with the movement. In these movements, consumers are generally buying into ideals that are much grander than the products themselves. Sometimes, they identify with the movement, sometimes they choose not to. However, the most important part of this new concept is that the consumer idealist consumes an ideal actively. In some cases, these consumers are actually activists in the traditional movement sense, and in other cases, they are distinct from the movement. However, the ideals that they are consuming originated within the movement, so their role relative to the movement is especially important. Their evolving relationship with the idealism and the movement needs to be analyzed longitudinally.

Fully understanding the consumer idealist requires understanding its counterpart, the consumed ideal. The consumed ideal is simple, conceptually, but much more complicated empirically. Just as the consumers who visit the farmers' markets consume so much more than just produce, the consumed ideal can be used to describe the idea that the consumer consumes. I draw from Paul Lichterman (1996) to help explain. While his work focused on political commitment and social responsibility, the central argument of his piece, that individualism supports political commitments, instead of the opposite, is helpful in framing the concept of the consumed ideal. Lichterman's piece was influential in that it considered the variability in interpretations of political and social responsibility. The consumed ideal is similar; the distinction, though, is that it recognizes the variability of potential interpretations of consumed ideals. While in this movement, the ideal is a farmer, the ideal could take any form, depending on the movement. Consumer activists absorb specific ideas disseminated by the leaders in the movement, personalizing them by only consuming the specific aspects that they find most desirable. The idea of the consumed ideal is important in that it helps understand the power, reach, and impact of movement leaders. Given the broad differences in the form of these ideals as well as how they are consumed, to fully understand the impact of movement leaders and their relationship with their followers, as well as the consumer idealists, scholars need to develop a portrait of what the consumed ideal looks like in each movement. This method has the potential to hybridize consumer activist literature and social movement literature.

Limitations

While this study has certainly inspired an enormous array of questions, and has begun to establish the importance of increasing the profundity and breadth of consumer research, it also has limitations. One of the most significant of these limitations is that it is a qualitative study. I fully recognize that the limitations of quality studies are numerous. The most important is undoubtedly that generalizability is reduced significantly. Thus, the power of this study is not in its ability to answer questions or make sweeping conclusions. Instead, I have helped propose a variety of very exciting new directions that sociologists can explore.

I also recognize the small scale of this study, even given the conventions of qualitative research. While 22 interviews are adequate when the interviewees are relatively homogenous, for this research, the whole group is bifurcated into two groups, consumers and vendors. The fact that I was only able to speak with twelve consumers and nine vendors from two Boston area farmers' markets has severely limited potential extrapolation from these findings. The addition of vendors and recognition of ideals has unequivocally added significant depth to previous studies, carried out in a smattering of small towns and cities across the country. However, this thesis has also shown the necessity that further research, if informed by the potential role of consumer idealists and consumed ideals, can realize the power of these new concepts, developing a much deeper, more analytical understanding of the interaction between social movements, consumerism and idealism.

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