Who Supports Community Supported Agriculture?

Re-Examining Exchange Relationships within

Community Supported Agriculture and Commodity Capitalism

An honor's thesis for the Department of Anthropology

Signe Porteshawver

Tufts University, 2011

Who Supports Community Supported Agriculture?

Re-Examining Exchange Relationships within

Community Supported Agriculture and Commodity Capitalism

Tables and Illustrations

Personal and Political Consumption:

Stabilizing CSA so it can Destabilize the Status Quo

What one eats is a political, ecological, and moral message about oneself; food constructs and portrays sociocultural, political, and class identities. It is at once incredibly personal and a matrix of relationships, both in production and consumption. This introduction explores how these relationships play out in individual modes of action, with an attempt to embed personal consumptive decisions in a broader discourse about economic change.

Land is the economic basis of all civilization and how it is used to sustain human populations is central to questions ranging from cultural ecology to environmental politics, and cultural conceptions of economy. In recent years there has been resurgence in the use of food as the basis for a social and political movement, bringing to the surface notions of community, moral economy, and cooperative consumption. Embedded in this movement is a deep-seated assumption that personal consumptive patterns can serve as effective politics.

That assumption was the starting point of this research and my journey as an advocate for sustainable agriculture. Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) introduced me to the perils of industrial farming, how it contaminates the environment, how it drives farmers off the land, how it fills the pockets of industry and leaves farmers poor and the poor in bad health. The book also offered an alternative, a farmer who has a closed loop system with pasture-raised animals, sells to local markets, and teaches apprentices. By supporting farmers like him, Pollan argued and I agreed, the industrial

system could be bypassed. Soon I took pride in my dedication to morally sound consumptive behaviors. I came to believe that by eating locally grown food, buying a community supported agriculture (CSA) share, and going to the farmers market, I was accomplishing my larger political goals: the promotion of civic agriculture, renewing a sense of community, building a new type of economy, and forging a connection with the Earth. With the influence of Michael Pollan, it is easy to assume that many local food eaters feel the same way. In a recent book review for the New York Times Pollan said:

> Though seldom articulated as such, the attempt to redefine, or escape, the traditional role of consumer has become an important aspiration of the food movement. In various ways it seeks to put the relationship between consumers and producers on a new, more neighborly footing, enriching the kinds of information exchanged in the transaction, and encouraging us to regard our food dollars as "votes" for a different kind of agriculture and, by implication, economy. The modern marketplace would have us decide what to buy strictly on the basis of price and self-interest; the food movement implicitly proposes that we enlarge our understanding of both those terms, suggesting that not just "good value" but ethical and political values should inform our buying decisions, and that we'll get more satisfaction from our eating when they do." (Pollan 2010)

I certainly got a lot of satisfaction whipping up 100% local meals, canning pickles, and raising chickens. But if I was also casting a vote, for what ballot? Were my newfound ethical and political values enacting change? Were they really turning the wheels of economic reform? When I began to think about this critically, and specifically about CSA, some complications emerged.

The "not in my refrigerator" or "not in my body" philosophy is a shaky political stance indeed. Firstly, it trusts completely in advertising and in the consumer to avoid false consciousness. It also ignores the corporate and governmental influence in agriculture, disregarding the structural problems of the food system. This mentality can only work for consumers who can choose to buy pasture-raised meat and organic

vegetables from farmers they know. The rest of the eaters are left with industrial food and all of the problems it causes: food injustice, environmental degradation, and the alienation of producers from consumers. Furthermore, an underlying assumption of the philosophy, as Pollan suggests, is that this type of purchasing is an effective way to participate in politics, to advocate for a new type of food system that alleviates some of the effects of industrial food. Can the selective purchasing behavior of individuals and small groups effectively change the way food is grown and distributed in this country?

In *Nature's Perfect Food*, E. Melanie DuPuis dissects this very debate through the lens of demand for organic milk. She argues that even if advertising generates false consciousness, consumers participate in politics through consumption. Going a step further than Pollan, she identifies a new sphere of politics in which consumers act. She defines this new political thought as "the ability to envision change and implement that change" (DuPuis 2002: 227). This envisioning is largely dependent on what she calls a "community of practice" (DuPuis 2002: 228), dialogic relationships between consumers, advocates, the mainstream media, and other groups that express opinions or report information about products. In the process of evaluating claims presented by communities of practice and then deciding to purchase a product based on these claims, consumers act politically. For DuPuis, this is true even of the organic milk consumers who do not consider themselves food advocates and even though the organic milk sector is largely controlled by one industrial company. However, she stops short of involving consumers in broader food system and economic reform.

DuPuis makes consumers agents, but if her consumers are envisioning change, it is not broad enough to include a restructuring of the marketplace. "Alternative"

agriculture occupies a sliver of the nation's food economy (Pollan 2006: 260). The organic sector itself is largely controlled by industrial conglomerates and operates much like the conventional system, demonstrating that categorical terms describing our food system are slippery indeed. Consumers who want reform in the food system must first sift through and make meaning of these terms, and even create their own.

Economic reform will not come from the semi-active consumer that DuPuis calls "reflexive", one who "takes in claims, but doesn't necessarily espouse any of them" (DuPuis 2002: 228), which may be the majority of consumers. This is not the type of consumer I was. However, her argument was not that the organic milk sector is an exemplar of effective politics in consumption, but that if politics can be found in the consumption of organic milk, a vertically integrated industry, they can be found anywhere in the alternative food regime. Certainly, Pollan's reasoning was about those consumers that do consider themselves a part of a social movement. I think DuPuis would agree that their consumption constitutes a stronger form of politics than reflexive consumption, something more like advocate consumption.

This advocate consumption, as Pollan suggests, works towards a different type of economy and can insert the producer in to DuPuis' "community of practice" (DuPuis 2002: 228), as do direct marketing relationships, which make the voice of the producer one of the many that contribute to consumer decisions. Advocate consumption is more than the amount of money shifted towards responsible foods and away from the industrial food complex. It is even deeper than the cultural capital built and displayed through the purchase of sustainable foods. Pollan is referring to a change in perception fostered by the food movement, a different interpretation of the responsibility of eaters within

agriculture and within the economy. These consumers envision broad change, and their role at enacting that change to be integrally important.

The changes envisioned are framed by sustainable food system approaches, which see a healthy food system as including social, economic, and environmental sustainability and justice (Ross 2005). Consumers that promote sustainable food systems have been termed "food citizens" (Wilkins 2005: 271). Wilkins identifies barriers to food citizenship, the first of which is the food system itself. The immense selection in the grocery store, oppressive and often unrealistic advertising, and the detachment from place that is involved in most food transactions are institutionalized and take initiative to overcome. Food citizens are concerned with the broader implications of their food choices to the extent of inconvenience (Ross 2005).

However, much like the consumers DuPuis speaks of, consumers of the food movement have a broad range of conceptions about what they purchase and why they do so. Therefore, broad change may focus on any number of causes that intersect with food, including sustainable agriculture, increasing food access, open space advocacy, community generation, youth empowerment, food sovereignty, food safety, food quality, food security, health and nutrition, education, slow food, local food, environmentalism and more.

Different consumers may not have as much advocacy to their consumption. Some may participate in the local food economy for none of the causes listed above. Some may participate by chance. Although certainly not a monolithic group, this food movement may exist under the umbrella of Pollan's statement. Consumers in the local, regional, and sustainable food economy can be envisioned as participating in or existing at the

periphery of what Wendell Berry describes the "party of the local community" (Berry 1995: 8-24).

A new, more thoughtful outlook on economic life has the power to transform how we behave in the marketplace and how we conceive of our role within it. Furthermore, it becomes information for DuPuis' community of practice to reason with. Pollan's notion and DuPuis' argument must be married: The conceptual change without the buying power will not generate reform, nor will the buying power without the conceptual change.

Sustainable food system approaches promote a diversity of strategies to work towards a strong food economy (Ross 2005). In addition to discussing ways to increase farmer income and support, sustainable food system approaches work to improve access to healthy and local foods, improve local processing and distribution of foods, discuss appropriateness of scale, the benefits and challenges of short food supply chains, social capital, and more (Ross 2005). A food systems approach considers CSA only a component of the development of regional food economies. This thesis therefore represents only a fraction of a section of food system development, which could inform the more variegated theoretical approaches to sustainable food system development.

This ethnography examines questions about the balancing act between conceptual change and economic clout through the lens of community supported agriculture (CSA). Can CSA be a medium for conceptual and social change? How do different forms of CSA work to reshape consumer notions of producer-consumer relationships, economic productivity, and shared experience through the market? More practically, what constitutes the community of practice in CSA? Most importantly, how do CSAs balance sustainability in the marketplace with their broader work at transforming it?

As much as this ethnography is about community supported agriculture and economic reasoning it is also about me. Admittedly, I came into this study with a deep appreciation for CSA. It seemed like the perfect way for consumers, including me, to participate in agriculture, eat great, and make positive change in the world. I had fallen in love with the concept, blogged about it, reveled in the experience of it, read books about it for pleasure, and promoted it. Through uncovering the core elements of the CSA concept, I situated my personal transformation in a broader economic context, and unpacked my assumption that all participation in CSA brings about unquestionably desirable change. I had to ask myself important and difficult moral questions: Do I really become a community member by participating in CSA? Is it realistic to envision personal buying power as the impetus for food system reform? Is this food movement that I so identify with economically sound?

To explore these personal and broader questions I set out to compare three northeastern CSA farms, with one of which I held a share. I had the opportunity to work at two of these farms primarily because my advisor, Cathy Stanton, had prior connections. She was already conducting a study for the Martin Van Buren National Historic Park, which involved Roxbury Farm. She also had connections with the folks at The Farm School since she was then living in Athol, where the farm is located. To set up a working relationship with World PEAS CSA, I had a conversation with my CSA coordinator about this project and my methods. Establishing a relationship with World PEAS was undoubtedly made easier by my position as a student at Tufts University, which helped found the CSA. My project proposal was cleared by the Tufts Institutional Review Board and funded by the Summer Scholars program.

My field methods included staying and working on the farms, as a form of participant-observation research, which was coupled with interviews with select farm personnel and shareholder surveys. The interviews were designed to get a sense of how interviewees situate CSA and sustainable agriculture in the broader economy, how their personal and farm histories brought them to CSA, and how CSA is envisioned and formulated at their specific farms. Each interviewee signed an informed consent form giving me permission to use data and quotes in this document. Everyone I interviewed asked that I call them by first name so I felt free to use first names in this thesis. I also referenced by last name, if quoted frequently. The people I interviewed were comfortable speaking on behalf of their organization and about food system questions. Many speak publicly about these issues. I spent a total of one week at each farm, although my experience varied greatly depending on the needs of the farm, housing availability, and the farms' modus operandi. Fieldwork was conducted from May to August, 2010.

Roxbury Farm in Kinderhook, New York is one of the largest CSA farms in the nation, with over 1,200 shareholders. My week there was spent weeding and doing other farm work, while staying off the farm in a friend's cabin. I conducted the fewest interviews there because I had ample opportunity for informal questioning. It was the only farm where I interviewed a shareholder, in this case one who was intimately involved with the economics of CSA and the farm and farmers. I utilized the results of this shareholder's member survey instead of developing my own.

At World PEAS CSA in Dracut, Massachusetts I only packed shares on random Tuesdays throughout the summer. This CSA is a cooperative of farmers who grow for the CSA and other markets. Their only participation in the CSA is to grow the food, so I

worked instead with their coordinator and marketing manager, only catching glimpses of farmers as they dropped off their vegetables to be packed and distributed. World PEAS is backed by a Tufts University affiliated nonprofit organization, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. I had the opportunity to interview the financial director and the CSA coordinator, and I contributed a couple of questions to their mid-season and end of season shareholder surveys.

The Farm School is also a non-profit organization. Their mission was extended to include CSA, but the organization primarily serves as an educational farm for urban and suburban kids. I stayed right on the farm in Athol, Massachusetts and was invited to participate in their summer camp programming as well as the work of their adult student farmers, who run the CSA. With such organizational depth I interviewed the founder, director, CSA manager, and head grower. I also had the opportunity to help out at a couple of their market-style distributions, which put me in touch with shareholders. I wrote mid-season and end of season shareholder surveys in their entirety, which were presented to the members as the work of a student anthropologist.

This thesis itself focuses just on The Farm School and Roxbury Farm. However, my fieldwork and interviews at World PEAS CSA informed my thinking and framework for understanding CSA in general and the three CSAs in relation to one another. So, although not discussed, World PEAS CSA served as a sort of "deep background" source for me. Since I did not have the opportunity to speak with farmers because of scheduling and language barriers I did not feel as if I got the whole picture at World PEAS.

In the introductory chapter I will offer a history of CSA, focusing on the economic and social movements that lead to its creation. Using this historical framework

and the anti-industrial-capitalist underpinnings that drove CSA's founding, I will pose questions about the future direction of CSA, and how its growth can include the vision of its founders.

Then, I will try to spell out what I mean by a new, more thoughtful outlook on economic life through the lens of Roxbury Farm CSA. Importantly, the transformational approach to farm economics that I present is as much the theory of the farmers as an anthropological attempt to frame their practices. It seems that Roxbury Farm is balancing economic reform with economic staying power, although this involves constant conversation and adaptation. Although Roxbury employs a more personal approach to economics, the large farm brings up questions of the morality of production driven enterprises and whether they leave space for community.

Turning to the definition of community, I will show that scale-based barriers to community formation may be less important than the masking of dependency relationships. This next chapter argues that although The Farm School works to bring back to life romantic versions of the past, they also uphold capitalist ideals of individualism and convenience. Offering an economic definition of community as about mutual dependence rather than symbolic appreciation, I conclude that CSA at The Farm School may be more like communion supported agriculture.

That being said, The Farm School does work towards some of the ideals of CSA's founders and works to build a local food system. Although CSA at The Farm School does not stand up to my definition of community, it still does not pull CSA too far out of shape. To finish the thesis, I argue that furthering the CSA movement in all forms is desirable and propose specific areas in need of growth.

Undoing Commodity Fetishism:

A history of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Introduction

Although certainly not comprehensive, this chapter will outline some of the paths that led to the formation of CSA in the United States. Logistically, CSA is a direct relationship between farmers and consumers, wherein shareholders, also known as members, put down money before the season starts and receive a regular distribution of food throughout the harvest months. CSA started in 1986 with one farm. A decade later there were close to 600 CSAs in the U.S. and Canada (Henderson and Van En 2007). In 2007 the USDA reported that 12,549 farms marketed products through CSA in the United States alone (USDA 2007).

According to the USDA's 2001 survey, this exponential growth has recruited young farmers, many of whom are highly educated, and 96% of whom farm according to organic or biodynamic methods (Lass et al. 2001). Although CSA farmers grossed more income other census farmers, 23% of farmers reported that they held their land in short-term lease agreements. Even with this uncertainty, however, CSA farmers reported finding overwhelming value in the model in terms of economic stability, personal well-being, and broadening connections with consumers (Lass et al. 2001). The results of this survey are highly supportive of CSA, but fail to frame its current success with the goals of its founders. That is the intent of this chapter.

First I will outline how the market fetishizes commodities, one of the main pitfalls of our capitalist food system, and will show how social movements ranging from consumer cooperation, the countercuisine, and *teikei* to community supported agriculture

have partly undone this process of fetishization. A Marxist framework will paint a historical continuum from consumer cooperation, which has the largest social distance between producers and consumers, fetishizes commodities the most, and is the furthest from the land economy, to CSA, which has the smallest social distance between producers and consumers, fetishizes commodities the least, and is closest to the land. In this history I will present some of the economic theorists that laid the groundwork for the move towards a more moral and grounded economy that has progressed since the consumer cooperative movement and that CSA's founders wanted to propel.

Unlike its antecedents, CSA focused on land economy and the process of production. Consumer cooperation demanded fairness in the market for the sake of consumers, only indirectly addressing production. The emergence of what Warren Belasco (1989) has called the "countercuisine" brought consumers closer to production, but lacked the economic infrastructure that would have given it staying power. CSA carried this movement further in the direction it was headed. Like consumer cooperation and the countercuisine, CSA has become a popular social movement. However, in the face of growth, the concept may undergo modifications that fundamentally change its orientation, its relationship to the dominant marketplace, and its future development.

Capitalism and industrialization: changing systems of dependency

The history of American agriculture is the history of a shift in systems of dependency. At one time nearly every American family grew food for the home and depended on neighbors for a portion of their subsistence. However, with the rise of the capitalist market system and the consolidation of market share by corporations, and later agribusinesses, self-reliance and dependency on neighborly exchange dwindled (Hurt

1994:73). Already by the 1870s, the percentage of farming Americans had dropped to under half (Hurt 1994: 73). This decline in farming population was propelled by the capitalist market system, which favored commodity production for money instead of subsistence production. Commodities offered more return on investment (money) since they could be grown and distributed en masse. Commodity production also favored more mechanized, industrial farming methods to improve efficiency and cut down labor costs. For these reasons, and with encouragement from the government, United States farmers continuously shifted to growing commodities, which were (and are) distributed through international commodity markets or through the supermarkets where farmers increasingly shopped (Hurt 1994: 73).

This shift to commodity production has caused a number of problems for farms and farmers. With commodity prices set according to distant markets, regional fluctuations in weather and localized fluctuations in growing conditions and labor availability were not accounted for, leaving farmers to deal with rising production and input costs. With the high level of production demanded by the market economy farmers had to invest in significantly more infrastructure, often requiring high interest loans (Hurt 1994: 164). Higher input costs were compounded by the rising price of land. To make up for high input and land costs, land use practices that optimized short term yield, rather than long-term viability were adopted (Hurt 1994: 164).

More than any of the specific repercussions of the increasing industrialization of society and of agriculture in the United States, which included the proliferation of middlemen, and the continued decline of farmers, among many other results, the shift toward more market-oriented production and consumption fostered a perception of the

economy as a system of monetary exchange at least once removed from the community where one lived (Hurt 1994: 117). This shift in dependency from the land and the local exchange of goods to a dependency on money is a shift thought inevitable with the commoditization of land, labor and money.

Reasons to stave off Marx's vision of the future of capitalism

"A market economy must compromise all elements of industry, including labor, land and money….But labor and land are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market" (Polanyi 1944: 74-75)

In his seminal text, *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi traces the rise of industrial capitalism through the commoditization of labor, land, and money. He describes these as fictitious commodities as they are not "produced for sale on the market" (Polanyi 1944: 75), like true commodities. The treatment of land and people as commodities would utterly destroy them, Polanyi argued, by dislocating people from the material and social needs of their existence. For this reason he saw the self-regulating market economy as socially and environmentally unsustainable.

As Marx described, the distancing of people from the social and material means of existence, or in other words the distancing of consumers from production, causes the fetishization of commodities, the disguising of the labor power required to produce them. The disguising of labor power is inherent in capitalist exchange since money appears to be a neutral or value-free measure. Laborers are alienated from their labor power because capitalists can seize control over the means of production, the product and its price, and

any profit generated from the sale of that product (Marx 1867: 166). This inherent class hierarchy and the destructiveness highlighted by Polanyi have been a site of resistance. The marketplace, tinged with power and mediated by the state, has historically generated distrust, reevaluation of consumer power, and social action among a minority of consumers.

A step away from Marx's future

One of the first influential examples of this kind of social action was the movement for consumer cooperation. Emerging in many regions of the world in the late nineteenth century, consumer cooperation worked to offer inexpensive food and other goods to industrial workers (Furlough and Strikwerda 1999: 1-66). As capitalist modes of production began to take hold, workers' control over labor, money, and access to goods diminished (Gurney 1996: 1-26). Consumer cooperation was a way to regain power, at least in the sphere of consumption, by offering goods at the lowest possible cost to cooperative members (Gurney 1996: 1-26). In *Consumers against Capitalism?* Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda describe how this movement had overtly political goals:

> The history of consumer cooperation is important not only because it was a significant economic and cultural counterpoint to emergent forms of capitalist commerce and at the center of working-class cultures and politics from the 1880s through the 1930s, but because cooperation exerted a powerful appeal within the era's political and intellectual imagination [Furlough and Strikwerda 1999: 2]

The goals of consumer cooperation were to build an egalitarian economy, and to use its surplus to further socialist ideals. As Peder Aléx describes in "Swedish Consumer Cooperation as an Educational Endeavor" in Furlough and Strikwerda's volume, some of these ideals included free price formation, economic responsibility, sovereignty of the economy from the state, economic training for social activists, and market diversity (Aléx

1999: 253-255). Free price formation was integral as it promised to assign the actual value to the product, avoiding fetishization by giving the consumer the power of knowing the correct price. This also removed the possibility of capital accumulation by middlemen. Economic responsibility was envisioned as broadening access to credit through education. The movement placed much more agency within consumption than Marx and saw consumption as the most effective way to accomplish political goals (Gurney 1996: 20-26).

The cooperatives that emerged to realize the power of consumption used cooperatively owned stores to forge social connections. These social connections differentiated groups of people who were accountable to one another from the masses, which participated in anonymous mass consumption. For this reason, Peter Gurney argues that the movement "attempted to moralise economic relations" (Gurney 1996: 22).

Consumer cooperation was widespread at one time, including in many rural agricultural communities throughout the United States (Hurt 2002: 204). However, despite the movement's successes in infiltrating the production and distribution of a range of goods and services, the capitalist market's ability to answer a diversity of needs and wants in the growing consumer culture out-competed cooperative modes of consumption (Furlough and Strikwerda 1999: 5-6). However, neither its moralizing ideals nor its practice disappeared completely. With consumer cooperative's emphasis on free enterprise, it is no surprise that ideals of the movement resurfaced after destructive government influence in the economy.

State bolstering of the market economy

Much like industrialization and commoditization of food shaped consumer power

and resistance, it also transformed the way the government participated in agriculture, what types of problems emerged for farmers, and how solutions for them were devised. Government price supports have shaped agricultural production throughout the last century and continue to do so. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Michael Pollan described the 1970s as a particularly revolutionary time in government-guided agriculture. Nixon era reforms and price supports were fueled by artificial fertilizer, which could be produced from excess war materials. With this readily available cheap resource, high food prices could be lowered by increasing production through economies of scale. Earl Butz, Nixon's secretary of agriculture, instated policies to encourage the use of fertilizers and other mechanistic modes of production by paying farmers directly as a way to generate false demand, thus encouraging over-production. These policies created a lasting dependency on government subsidies, chemical inputs, and mechanized agriculture (Pollan 2006: 51-53).

The abundant food production encouraged by Butz's policies and earlier government price-control and subsidy systems made food artificially cheap. State-repressed prices masked environmental degradation and the increasingly volatile job of farming. The policies led to the growth of farm size, increased chemical inputs on those farms, drove many farmers off the land (Pollan 2006: 52), and caused the surplus production of corn and soy, the building blocks of processed foods and factory farmed animals (Pollan 2006: 103). These developments caused many repercussions, including the emergence of a "countercuisine" (Belasco 1989).

Countercuisine works to include producers in consumption

Much like the movement for consumer cooperation, the United States

environmental movement of the 1970s and the coincident food movement, what Warren J. Belasco calls the "countercuisine", struggled to compete with and transform the market economy. As Belasco describes, throughout the 1960s and 1970s influential books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) fueled a heightened sense of concern about the industrial food brought about by the policies of Earl Butz's USDA. Both Carson and Lappé emphasized the destructiveness of industrial agriculture on personal and environmental health. These and other controversial publications coupled with coverage of a steady stream of environmental disasters in the press fostered a growing skepticism about the food system and industrial modes of production. This skepticism was primarily directed towards corporate food producers, who were seen to be fooling consumers into eating nutritiously comprised food while degrading the natural environment (Belasco 1989: 29-42).

To form a more transparent economic system, the countercuisine organized consumer cooperatives and "country communes" (Belasco 1989: 76-87). Inserting production into the theory of a Marxist alternative, consumers spent more time in the kitchen and the garden. This was the expression of a vision for a decentralized society that fit into the ecology of the Earth. Communes were seen as a way to disengage from the market economy and build up a "model community" (Belasco 1989: 76) made up of people who were even more accountable to one another than the consumers of consumer cooperation, as they were also involved in cooperative production. Along with communes, the countercuisine saw the local distribution of food, and face to face communication with farmers (or fellow commune-dwellers) as a way to foster the growth of communities embedded in regional economy (Belasco 1989: 69-76).

To promote local and more personal distribution of food, a new generation of cooperative grocery stores was born. Like earlier consumer cooperation, the countercuisine worked to generate social relations among consumers by using the coop as an educational tool and as a nexus of political ideals. However, the countercusine's cooperatives had a different take on cost. Instead of offering goods at the lowest possible price, the coops tried to establish a system in which price was secondary. The countercuisine urged people to care about process, not product, an insistence that worked to defetishize food. Primarily, coops were seen as a way to propel the countercuisine's political agenda. Selling food was simply a medium for or entry point into politics (Belasco 1989: 87-94).

Although communes and coops worked to embed social relations in production, they lacked the infrastructure to make a lasting imprint of these ideals on the economy. Communes fell apart as they struggled to come to terms with their lasting dependence on the market. Coops struggled to balance economic staying power with upholding their political ideals. Many coops that did well sold out to corporate companies and those that remained were supplementary to grocery stores rather than their alternative (Belasco 1989: 94-100).

If anything, coops helped the food industry realize the existence of a market for healthy foods. Until this point, the food industry had dismissed the countercuisine as faddish, hippy, and idealistic. Suddenly the industry was using key countercuisine ideas for their marketing ends. The use of key phrases and words of the countercuisine in mass advertising was a way to give consumers what they wanted—the feeling that foods were natural, nutrient-dense and artisanal. If they truly were was of no importance to industry

(Belasco 1989: 111-131).

The birth of "big organic"

The adoption of national organic standards in 1997 solidified a transition from concern over process to a concern over product within the natural food sector. Initially, the announcement that national organic standards were being developed by the USDA was seen as a victory for organic farmers and advocates. When the first draft of the rules allowed genetically modified crops, application of sewage sludge, and irradiation, advocates were appalled. Although the standards received so many comments that those three allowances were removed, it was clear that the motive to create the standards was not the promotion of sustainable agriculture but instead a way to make room for industrial agriculture in the market for alternative food. To organic paradigm promoters, the standards represented a destructive shift in organics—instead of organic as a mindset and a set of practices on the farm, it became about product differentiation in the marketplace (Ingram and Ingram 2005: 121-148).

The focus on organic as a marketing device more than a set of practices has led to broad-scale industrialization of the organic sector. Michael Pollan calls the organic agribusiness sector "big organic" (Pollan 2006: 134-184). Capitalizing on idyllic perceptions of organic farms in our society, and the word "organic" as a literary device that invokes the feeling of a connection to the Earth, organic agribusiness has been able to cultivate an $11 billion industry based largely on false consciousness. "The organic label may conjure an image of a simpler agriculture," Pollan writes, "but its existence is an industrial artifact" (Pollan 2006: 137).

With the promulgation of national organic standards, the government stepped in to

standardize the information exchanged about farming to eaters, the rule an inadequate replacement for the conversation that many "alternative" farmers believe should occur between farmer and consumer. The organic label is "a concession to the reality that most people in an industrial society haven't the time or the inclination to follow their food back to the farm, a farm which today is apt to be, on average, fifteen hundred miles away" (Pollan 2006: 137). This is not the first time government participation in economy and agriculture has had adverse effects for this social movement, which tries to bridge the gap between producers and consumers instead of widening it. As industrial food companies took over the market for natural foods, it became apparent that economic reform could be more productively focused on the interaction of farmers and consumers, which was unmediated by corporations or the state.

Another resistance to the fetishization of commodities

In Japan, direct market relations emerged during the U.S. environmental movement. Much like members of the countercuisine, many Japanese were beginning to worry about the toxins in their food supply. A group of mothers met with area farmers in 1971 to start an agreement similar to CSA, known as *teikei*, translated as "food with a farmer's face" (Henderson and Van En 2007: 267). This agreement is an alternative economic system autonomous from the industrial marketplace, which still exists today (Henderson and Van En 2007: 267-271).

CSA-like agreements were developing in Europe at the same time. During the 1970s, Jan Vandertuin, a United States farmer, left the country to find a form of farming that was ecologically sound as well as socially and economically just. His anxieties about agriculture in the United States were not focused on environmental toxins like *teikei*'s

founders, but he saw them as part of a larger problem: the lack of commitment between producers and consumers (Vandertuin 1988).

What he found and helped to form was Topinambur, a farm near Zurich, Switzerland driven by the formal commitment of a group of consumers. When Vandertuin returned to the east coast of the United States in 1985, Robyn Van En, a small scale grower in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts, was eager to learn about Topinambur. Even though Van En had a community willing to buy her produce, she was uncomfortable being the sole investor in the farm. "I spent long periods, generally while hoeing, trying to formulate a better way to oblige both the grower and the eaters," she wrote (Henderson and Van En 2007: xiii). "The better way would be something cooperative, an arrangement that would allow people to draw upon their combined abilities, expertise, and resources for the mutual benefit of all concerned" (Henderson and Van En 2007: xiii-xiv). Soon after Vandertuin introduced the CSA idea to Van En, it was up and running. Indian Line Farm became the first CSA in the country just as the acronym CSA was adopted and spread. It was the spring of 1986.

The vision for CSA extended far beyond agriculture. At its core CSA would accomplish "local food for local people at a fair price to them and a fair wage to the growers" (Henderson and Van En 2007: xiv). At the periphery, CSA would promote a social transformation to generate communities supported by agriculture. CSA was not seen purely as a marketing model, but as the path to farm viability, enriched producer-consumer relationships, and a connection with the land (Henderson and Van En 2007: xiii-xvi). It upheld some of the ideals of consumer cooperation and the countercuisine, and pushed them further.

Free price formation was integral to CSA. Differing from consumer cooperation, however, free price formation in CSA was a means to ensure long term viability of the farm, rather than empower the consumer. The concept of free price formation can be traced back to Rudolf Steiner, a post WWI Austrian philosopher with cross-disciplinary theories in a diversity of fields, including architecture, education, economy, and agriculture. Steiner was voicing concerns about the nature of the market economy long before Polanyi. These concerns were presented in a lecture series delivered in 1925 called *World Economy*. Among other characteristics, a world economy would be unhindered by nationalist motives, government intervention, and human egos (Budd 1993).

To the consumer cooperative movement, the only way to ensure the lowest prices for consumers was free price association, which can only be ensured by free enterprise, which required the movement to "consider the whole world its marketplace" (Aléx 1999: 253). The countercuisine problematized this notion of low price, insisting that political ideals should come before consumer convenience (Belasco 1989: 87-93). CSA then took those ideals and embedded them in price. To accomplish this, CSA put into practice more of Steiner's theory of world economy, including the notion of balanced egos.

Christopher Budd from the Centre for Associative Economics describes how Steiner's theory of egotism shapes production:

> Thus, those who take up his [Steiner's] ideas and endeavor to give them practical expression will be those who are intent on abating their own egoism in the economic life, people whose concern will be to ensure that their contribution to society, even if they earn their living from it, is of benefit to society generally and not undertaken merely as a means of getting money (Budd 1993: 4).

The evading of self interest in CSA is accomplished by acknowledging and satisfying the

farmer's needs so that she may focus on growing food for her community, instead of on making ends meet. This acknowledging of needs has been termed the "whole farm approach" (Courtens 2006), whereby the price of the share is determined by "considering all the costs associated with cultivating and harvesting the produce, along with the needs of all those who agree to provide the service, and their dependents" (Lamb 1994: 4) as well as the long term needs of the farm including farm improvements, such as building soil fertility.

In associative economy, producer and consumer engage in a conversation about each other's needs and arrive at a fair price together. In this way, making a profit is a natural byproduct of satisfying a human need, which is the motivating economic force (Karp 2008). The dialogue between producers and consumers also discusses the risks of the market. It discusses the weather, the change of the seasons, and unexpected attacks. In this way, the dialogue empathizes the marketplace. This conversation must also be about the price of land. In associative economy, all shared pragmatic risks are shared financially. CSA offers a way to distribute the risks of production more evenly by including them in the decision of price establishment (Lamb 1994).

CSA factored the ideals of the countercuisine, which included a decentralized, more neighborly economy, into price. I think it is important to quote Belasco at length here, to fully illustrate how this concept of price embodied the ideals of the countercuisine. Although CSA is not mentioned in *Appetite for Change* (first published just three years after CSA's first appearance in the United States), Belasco describes what the countercuisine sought as being remarkably similar to what associative economy, CSA, and biodynamic agriculture offer:

> Ideally farmers and customers would deal directly with each other, in farmers' markets, or through relatively straight channels: farmer to Mama-Papa grocer to customer. Such direct links would restore the face-to-face intimacy lost in mass-scale supermarkets and mass society in general. In conjuring up the neighborhood grocery and vegetable stand, Rodale editor Goldstein invoked a nostalgia that Americans had felt ever since the advent of the supermarket age. In a direct marketing system, if prices seemed high one season, the producer could explain firsthand: a drought, a cold snap, or whatever. Eliminating misunderstanding and distrust, direct marketing might result in alliances between producers and consumers against the true villains in most radical analyses of the food system: predatory corporate middlemen, the processors and distributors. Eliminating the middlemen would leave more money in the hands of farmers, thus making it more economically viable to be small and diversified rather than to go the large-scale monocultural/conglomerate route. Consumers would benefit from healthier food that might also be cheaper once there were enough organic farmers to supply the demand.
>
> Such a transformation would require changes in values and expectations—but what economic revolution could go without a cultural one? No more demand for plastic tomatoes in January, more self-reliance, better consumer attention to food quality—and a willingness to pay for it. Farmers would have to be viewed as long-term trustees of a living soil, rather than as short-term miners of chemically interchangeable nutrients. Food would have to be viewed not merely as a commodity to be rationalized or a set of nutrients to be metabolized, but as a medium of communication, a symbol of a whole way of life, an edible dynamic. (Belasco 1989: 74-75)

Belasco conveyed the consumer's side of this change needed in agriculture. Included are the dialogue of associative economy and the practice of biodynamic agriculture, the stuff of CSA. Associative economy and biodynamic agriculture, both practical approaches to Steiner's theory, see a farm as one interconnected organism, which includes consumers. Biodynamic farmers perform many practices and rituals that nurture soil life (Vanderbeck 2010)—they are "trustees of a living soil" (Belasco 1989: 75). Biodynamic theory connects the life of the soil to every other aspect of the farm, creating a single, closed-loop organism. Through associative economy, this soil life is embedded in the dialogue between producers and consumers. The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, founded in the United States in 1938, sees biodynamics and

CSA as inextricably linked (Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association 2009). This is because biodynamic agriculture cannot be possible without an economic system that brings us closer to associative economy.

Gary Lamb describes how CSA can be a conduit for associative economy:

> The give and take interaction and cooperation inherent in the CSA's practical arrangements create certain possibilities:
> 1. For farmers to know the needs of the community before beginning to work the land
> 2. For the consumers to have an opportunity to express to the farmers what their food needs and financial limits are
> 3. For commitments to be consciously established between farmers and consumers
> 4. For the farmers' needs to be recognized, thus freeing them to serve the community. (Lamb 1994: 2)

As Steiner describes in *World Economy,* in an associative economy "The wide outlook over the economic process will be active; the interest of the other fellow will actually be there in the economic judgment that is formed" (Steiner 1977: 132-133 in Lamb 1994: 8). A part of considering the well-being of the fellow on the other end of the transaction is a coming to understand the modes of production and the meaning behind consumption. For this reason, Indian Line Farm, Temple Wilton Community Farm, and other early CSA farms sought direct consumer involvement with the farms (McFadden 2004). This involvement included sharing the risks of investment, pitching in labor, and celebrating the bounty of the seasons (Van En 1988).

CSA founder Robyn Van En describes how community participation is integral to biodynamics and associative economy:

> Our ideals for agriculture come to expression in the biodynamic method of farming which seeks to create a self-sustaining and improving ecological system in which virtually nothing needs to be imported and everything has its place in the cycle of the seasons. Our ideals for the community come to expression through

> the sale of shares in the harvest which enable the sharers to provide a decent standard of living and working conditions for the staff and to provide long term security for the land that supports us. The community involvement in the rhythms of the seasons and the celebration connected with them will also enable us to find our proper spiritual connection to nature again. (Van En 1988)

Associative economy through CSA also reshaped consumer cooperation's notion of responsible economics. In consumer cooperation, economics was responsible if access to credit was equitable (Aléx 1999: 254). In associative economy, access to credit is also about access to land, as Van En mentions. The burden of land security should not rest solely on the shoulders of farmers, for the whole community depends on its stewardship. Furthermore, the fictitious commoditization of land inherent in our capitalist system drives up the price of land out reach of most farmers. For this reason, the community land trust movement was seen as integrally important to the sustainability of CSA and the furthering of associative economy.

Indeed, a community land trust was eventually used to preserve Indian Line Farm after Van En's death in 1997. This was accomplished via an alliance with the E. F. Schumacher Society. Much like *Silent Spring* and *Diet for a Small Planet,* Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered* (1973) called for a sense of urgency and a new perspective on economic, social, and environmental relationships. Schumacher argued for appropriately scaled, locally-based economies. His theories are practiced today by the E.F. Schumacher Society, founded in 1980 with the mission to "promote the building of strong local economies that link people, land and community" (E.F. Schumacher Society).

The community land trust movement was spearheaded by Schumacher Society president Robert Swann as a way to fulfill the Society's mission by collectively

purchasing land, which was subsequently removed from the speculative market economy. Land thus purchased is effectively de-commoditized (Witt and Swann 1988). With community-raised funds, Indian Line Farm was incorporated into a land trust in 1999 and will be farmed sustainably indefinitely (Witt 2002). CSA and community land trust thus work toward undoing the fetishization of food by decommodifying land and by expanding producer consumer dialogue.

The vision for CSA was to engage consumers in production by bringing them physically closer to the land, as communes did, and also by negotiating their participation in the land economy. Unlike consumer cooperation and the countercuisine, CSA packs consumer and producer needs and the ideals of ecological agriculture into price. This investment in the land economy frees the land from fictitious commoditization and does not leave the "the substance of society" up to "the laws of the market" (Polanyi 1944: 74-75).

Sharing the risks of farming with the farmer by paying up front, before a single seed was ordered, much less the collective purchase of land, were unprecedented ideas in the United States before 1986. Before CSA, and today for non-CSA farmers, the risk rests primarily on the shoulders of farmers, who carry the burden of loans, and taxpayers, who pay for the subsidies and price supports.

Future steps in which direction?: Research questions

Since its start CSA has spread in different forms, taking root in every state in the country. As it has diversified from the original concept some of its founders' goals have been diluted, left behind, and adapted. In *Sharing the Harvest: a citizen's guide to CSA* Elizabeth Henderson says, "While participants agree that CSA means a connection

between a specific group of eaters and a specific piece of land and the people who farm it, healthy debates roar on about how to understand the concepts of 'sharing the risk,' 'community,' 'support,' and even 'agriculture'" (Henderson and Van En 2007: 9).

As described earlier, CSA emerged out of a convergence of social, economic, and agricultural ideals and was envisioned as a process: community supported agriculture (CSA) to agriculture supported community (ASC). However, according to the USDA over 12,000 farms marketed food through CSA in 2007 (USDA 2007) and not all of their goals are as broad. This is a reflection of both farmer and consumer perspectives. Some farmers see CSA solely as a great marketing model and some consumers see CSA solely as a great way to get high quality, organic produce. The CSAs that involve these types of farmers and consumers are called subscription CSAs (Henderson and Van En 2007: 152-153). In the subscription model, there is little interaction between farmers and shareholders or shareholders and the farm. The extent of shareholder involvement can be picking up a box from a hallway.

Steven McFadden, a community journalist and CSA activist, calls these types of CSAs "second wave" (McFadden 2004). There is anxiety among CSA advocates over whether this type of growth is desirable and if these second wave farms will make it in the long run. One such advocate asks pressing questions: "But what's going to happen when questions of sustainability arise for people without a set of shared values? What happens when tough economic times catch up with subscription farms? Is a community really necessary for a CSA? Or do you just need a group of consumers?" (McFadden 2004). In light of these social movements that have empowered consumption, is any group of consumers *just* a group of consumers? Where do we draw the line between

community and consumers? Is there a moment at which CSA strays so far from the creators' concept that we can no longer call it CSA? Based on the historical successes and challenges of the movements leading up to CSA, it is clear that an anxiety about the co-optation of alternative economics by the dominant market regime is a healthy one.

What is necessary to retain to make the CSA model sustainable? This definition of sustainability must include a diversity of goals. It should increase the local and regional distribution of food. It must take a form that is somehow against the grain of the market economy. It must make more sustainable farms viable. It must ground the economy by uncovering its dependency on natural resources. Sustainability must also be farm, farmer, and consumer specific, which is the nature of CSA. This diversity is a strong suit. It represents the diversity of needs, cultural meanings of food, and cultural interpretations of farming in our society.

In order for this diversity to be a strength in the long run, it must be a bank for evolution. Individual CSAs or membership levels must change if shareholders want something different. Member commitment must evolve to meet the needs of farmers. Farmers must adapt to the needs of eaters. With the range of CSAs on the market and, as I will describe later, Dick Shirey's theory of demand for CSA, this is possible. People can participate in the CSA that generates the type of community they want to be a part of and people who do not feel a part of the CSA community can come to. Putting CSA in a box, defining it specifically, would be a detriment to its primary strong suit—the dialogic space that it generates.

The dialogue that CSA encourages is not just about consumer and farmer satisfaction, it is discourse about the functioning of our economy. For instance, advocates

are concerned that subscription style CSAs will not be able to survive in times of land insecurity. Although the disappearance of those farms is a detriment to the local distribution of food, it sends a clear message to the used-to-be shareholders and to other farmers starting CSA. This message is a critique of the private ownership of land and of the mostly anonymous, subscription form of CSA. This message asserts the necessity of community participation in agriculture, that farming is only sustainable if there is active consumer commitment. The conversation changes perceptions of what makes up a functioning, vibrant, and sustainable economy, and the role individuals play within it.

Perhaps the most important conversation that CSA generates is about the interconnection of our economy with the land that sustains us. Undoubtedly the most pressing concern for the long-term sustainability of CSA is access to affordable land. Both the success and failure of CSA farms can ground our economy. This is because CSA shows consumers that the land is the basis of all economic activity by bringing consumers into the "party of the local community" (Berry 1996: 80). The party of the local community respects the connections so often disregarded by the corporate-dominated marketplace: useful work and human need, food and agriculture, preserved land and the economy, the health of farming practices and the health of eaters, and the health of community and "the way it makes its living" (Berry 1996: 81).

The dialogue about the weather, the natural environment in the region, and the horizon over the piece of land that produces shareholder food that CSA creates, connects shareholders to where they live, the others with whom they share risk, and invigorates their relationship with the natural world. As CSA brings out these connections, the values that some observers worry do not exist in subscription CSAs can be generated. That

being said, CSA will be in it for the long haul only if the conceptual change it brings about produces a community of people that consider the land as commons:

> I do know that the human economy as a whole depends, as it always has, on nature and the land economy. The economy of land use is our link with nature. Though economic failure has not yet called any official attention to the land economy and its problems, those problems will have to be rightly solved if we are to solve rightly our other economic problems. (Berry 2010: 27)

The main question of this ethnography is how far can CSA be stretched before it is pulled out of shape, before it loses track of the core reasons why CSA was founded: to ground the economy and to distance food and farming from the commodity sphere, to establish price as real marker of value and as the economic basis of ensuring its future, to link producers and consumers through mutual commitment to one another and to the land, to grow food that is "essential vital" (Van En 1988), to establish an economic rationale in which "the means (community) assures the end (quality food)" (Van En 1988).

Redefining Relationships of Exchange: Roxbury Farm CSA

Community land security: the history of Roxbury Farm CSA

Jean-Paul Courtens started Roxbury Farm in 1989 on his wife's family's land in Claverack, New York. Although he had been trained in biodynamic agriculture and associative economy at Warmonderhof, a four-year state school in the Netherlands, CSA was not a part of the original operation. However, just one year after the farm's establishment, Jean-Paul was approached to start CSA. Consumers from a New York anthroposophical society wanted to establish a direct relationship with a farmer. This should come as no surprise since anthroposophy is the spiritual science envisioned by Rudolf Steiner, the practice of which includes both biodynamics and associative economy. The thirty member base soon expanded to include a group from the Committee for Peace and Justice of the Albany Catholic Diocese, an effort headed primarily by the still shareholder Dick Shirey. In an interview Shirey told me that many of the initial members are still with the farm. He describes why members of the church community initially signed up for a share:

> The impulse was that people who joined were doing it for ethical reasons: interest in supporting the farmer and the farmer's family. The secondary reasons were that people would get fresh, organic vegetables and would have the opportunity to do a little farm work, visit the farm, go to a farm festival… The whole idea of CSA seemed to be win win win win win. You participate in supporting the farmer, you are creating a better piece of land, you aren't supporting the chemical companies and the industrial agricultural practices. All of these were wins as far as most people were concerned. It is a very attractive idea in terms of all the benefits that come out of it.

It is clear that the initial shareholders at Roxbury were not passive consumers. They sought out Jean-Paul as a way to participate in ecologically sound agriculture through spiritually sound economics. This mindset and the ability of Jean-Paul to

cultivate a sense of community amongst the farm's members have led to prosperity. Through word of mouth and other groups of people signing on together, membership at Roxbury Farm grew rapidly. Only seven years after its start, the CSA had 650 shareholders and CSA drop points in New York City, the Capital District, and Columbia County.

When the farm's lease was up and Jean-Paul was forced to move the farm, these shareholders "were willing to put their money where their mouths were" (Courtens 2006). Like many CSA farmers, Jean-Paul did not have the capital to finance the purchase of a new piece of land, especially one that needed significant capital investment to remediate the soil. This can be a major problem for biodynamic and CSA farmers that believe in building up soil life. Investing in the soil for years before a single seed is planted is hard to rationalize if land can only be held in short term lease agreements. Chuck Matthei, founder of Equity Trust, "a national non-profit organization committed to changing the spirit and character of our material relationships" (Equity Trust, Inc.) sees land security as the biggest barrier to CSA's growth. When he heard about Roxbury Farm's dilemma, he saw it as a great opportunity to set an example for other CSA farmers that collective ownership of land is a viable option (Courtens 2006).

Although the non-profit fronted the purchase, they were reimbursed by charitable donations from shareholders. In *Biodynamics and Roxbury Farm* Jean-Paul explains that the generosity of the shareholders was a reflection of the trust they had built up during the years of CSA. The shareholders were willing to purchase the land because the CSA was operated "out of service (as opposed to self interest)", and because the CSA members, especially the most active members, saw the food as the representation of their "personal

relationship with the farm" (Courtens 2006: 9). Jean-Paul concludes "It was never about us personally although trust is something we generally attribute as a process between people; it was about securing a piece of land that nourished them and the activities it generated" (Courtens 2006: 9).

Already we can begin to see both production and consumption viewed in a light not filtered by Marx. The remainder of this chapter will break down Marx's theory by reframing the nature of what is exchanged in economic transactions and how the social relationships of exchange play a role in this reframing.

Alternatives to Marx's theory of value

As described in the introduction, CSA de-fetishized food by bringing consumers closer to production. Indeed, associative economy was posed as an alternative theory to the commodity system analyzed by Marx, which viewed the relationship between the value of commodities and the relationship between transactors as completely autonomous. In this respect, CSA is more similar to gift exchange, wherein objects acquire value from their transactors, than commodity exchange. Pinpointing what is being exchanged through CSA, and uncovering the nature of the share as an object, is the aim of this section.

The only value that Marx's theory of value imparts to commodities is the labor power required to produce them. A CSA share is not such a commodity, for it obtains value from the farmers exchanging the share. For Marx, commodity exchange was "material relations between people and social relations between things" (Marx 1930: 321), thus mystifying the means of production. It is easy to apply Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities to food. With its cultural significance food is often seen as

having tremendous value in consumption. A turkey on Thanksgiving is symbolic, patriotic, and familial. However, those very meanings disguise the turkey's real value in Marx's terms, the human labor spent to raise it.

In Marcel Mauss' theory of gifts, objects only obtain value outside of labor power. The value of the gift is determined by the social relationship of exchange such that value is inseparable from the gifter. The spirit that the gifter imparts on the object is its value, which is a part of the gifter himself. This spirit is the degree to which the receiver is indebted and that which compels reciprocation. Those who gift more are of higher social standing (Mauss 1990: 11-41). Motive in this form of exchange, then, is the maximization of social status through endless reciprocal gifting (Gregory 1982).

C.A. Gregory describes the distinction between gift exchange and commodity exchange in *Gifts and Commodities*. Gift exchange is the "exchange of inalienable things between transactors in a state of reciprocal dependence" (Gregory 1982: 12), while commodity exchange is "exchange of alienable things between transactors in a state of reciprocal independence" (Gregory 1982: 12). Although gifts and CSA both problematize Marx's theory of value, CSA is not quite gift exchange either. Table 1 shows how CSA can be seen as existing somewhere in between these two poles. CSA shares share characteristics with both gifts and commodities, allowing us to consider these types of exchange on a continuum.

Table 1: A sort of Venn diagram for gifts, commodities and CSA

Gift	CSA	Commodity
Objects are inalienable	Ownership of share changes hands	Objects are alienable
Persons of exchange in a state of reciprocal dependence	Farmer and shareholder dependent upon each other	Persons of exchange in a state of reciprocal independence
Desire for social relationships	Desire for vegetables and desire for community	Desire for objects
Accumulation of social prestige	Both making a living and building social networks are incentives in CSA	Accumulation of capital
Anthropomorphic quality of objects	Share is distinct from farmer, yet acquires a value from her	People and things are distinct
Exchange relationship dependent on the method of consumption	Value depends both upon social aspects of exchange and upon commodity production	Exchange relationship dependent on the method of production
Exchange relationship between transactors	Farmer and shareholder connect. The share is exchanged for money.	Exchange relationship between objects
Maximization of outgoings	Farmers want to give out more quality food and to form more social relationships in order to retain members.	Maximization of incomings
Singular	Commodity produced for a select pool of consumers	Generalized
Demonstration of social relationships	Connection to local farmers yet perhaps unconnected to their labor power	Mystification of social relationships
Transactors are related	Farmer and shareholder can have a relationship or never meet in person	Transactors are strangers
Laborers have control over their product	Farmer owned and operated	Alienation of laborers
Moral	Farmers adequately compensated, shareholders pay actual value of food	Immoral

Marshal Sahlins proposed such a continuum in *Stone Age Economics* (1972). He theorized that the type of exchange depended on the social distance between transactors. The closer the social distance between transactors, he reasoned, the less fetishized the object and the more moral the exchange. In his theory, generalized reciprocity is the most social form of exchange, which occurs between kin. Balanced reciprocity is "more economic" and "less personal," occurring in relationships contained within the tribe; negative reciprocity is the most economic and antisocial, occurring in the "intertribal sector" (1972: 199). It is easy to imagine how this model might be extended to the particular case of the agricultural economy, with on-farm general reciprocity occupying one pole and the global/industrial agricultural economy the other.

In his essay for the volume *The Social Life of Things,* Igor Kopytoff goes on to examine why objects in the spheres of closer social distance and higher morality have more value. He suggests that objects of greater value are so valued because of their singularity, because they resist the generalizing effect of the commodity marketplace (Kopytoff 1986: 73-76). The removal of a commodity from the commodity sphere, which Kopytoff calls singularization, reflects a moral, sentimental, aesthetic, religious, etc. value in the object. This value is ascribed to the object by individuals and groups that share ideological ideals. In this way the cultural valuation of objects creates individual- and group-specific ordering of spheres of exchange based on what is socially appropriate and morally advisable.

The ideal construction that governs the valuation of objects is in constant flux within the individual, between individuals and across groups such that spheres of exchange are constantly reordered (Kopytoff 1986: 78-79). Likewise, the ideological

value of an object is in constant dialogue with its commodity value. Kopytoff explains:

> The peculiarity of complex societies is that their publicly recognized commoditization operates side by side with innumerable schemes of valuation and singularization devised by individuals, social categories, and groups, and these schemes stand in irresolvable conflict with public commoditization as well as with one another. (Kopytoff 1986: 79-80)

As Kopytoff suggests of all singularized commodities, CSA is at once a different, more moral sphere of exchange than the broader market economy and at the same time entangled in it, constructed in opposition to it, and dependent on it. Gary Lamb, an associative economist and director of the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association demonstrates how this tension plays out in the minds of CSA's advocates, who have three main perceptions of agriculture in relation to the market economy:

> 1. Agriculture should be removed from the economy altogether. It is primarily a cultural activity of tending and cultivating the land, and the food that is produced is a by-product of this activity. Therefore the nature of agriculture is different from that of industry.
> 2. Agriculture is a part of the economy. But true agriculture that does not exploit nature cannot compete in the economy as does industry; it needs special conditions in order to function. For instance, most sustainable farms are not in a position to pay land mortgages based on existing market values. Therefore, ways need to be found to make land available for agriculture at low or no cost.
> 3. Part of agriculture is in the economy and part of it is not. Adherents of this perspective usually cite the activity of harvest as the dividing line. Cultivation, planting, and growing up to the point of harvest is seen as a cultural, tending activity. Once harvesting takes place, the food takes on a commodity character and enters the economic process. (Lamb 1994: 2-3)

The first perception is unrealistic in a sense, but gets at something that is central to biodynamic farming, associative economy, and CSA: the refusal to consider labor and land commodities. The second perception also denies land and labor as commodities, but recognizes that farmers must have a way of distributing their goods and people must have a way to exchange for them, namely the market. Finally, the third perception converges with Kopytoff's theory that objects float in and out of the commodity sphere. What it

leaves out is the group-specific, culturally constructed, morally hierarchical distinction of spheres of exchange which gives the share social value even as a commodity and the singularized value of the share that pulls it from the commodity sphere immediately after the brief exchange of money. In short, it leaves out the nature of exchange.

What is the nature of exchange in the Roxbury Farm CSA? How is the share singularized by CSA shareholders? How do shareholders conceive of CSA in relation to the market economy? In order to understand the nature of what is being exchanged at Roxbury Farm, and how the share fits into this theory of social distance and a continuum of commoditization I will use my fieldwork to analyze the social distance between producers and consumers.

Farming at Roxbury is more than a job: Production

Now situated in Kinderhook, New York, Roxbury Farm is well-organized and busy. Each day owners Jody Bolluyt and Jean-Paul Courtens convene with the other farmers to talk about the day's work. After the reading of an anthroposophical proverb, tasks are quickly delegated and talked over and the crew splits up to complete them. Including Jody and Jean-Paul, six farmers run the show at Roxbury. Two young couples serve as apprentices and take on important responsibilities—they do tractor work, supervise washing and packing on distribution days, organize seeding in the greenhouse, and work on independent projects. The crew also includes three Mexican women who are fast workers, fast talkers, and good friends. Everyone else on the farm calls them "the ladies."

One of the ladies has worked on the farm for over a decade and none of the three are planning on leaving or trying to build their own farms. The younger couples,

however, are at Roxbury for that very reason. In a way Cara Fraver, my primary interlocutor, epitomizes a main group of farmers in the CSA movement. From a non-farming background, Cara got into the business because of the powerful social change she thinks it can bring about, and for a more humble way of life. Although Sarah Lawrence does not have traditional majors, Cara carved out something like the politics of agriculture as an undergraduate. After finishing up with a solid understanding of the biological and societal aspects of farming, Cara went on to work at *Just Food*, a food access organization that has established a number CSAs in inner city neighborhoods in New York. With *Just Food* Cara organized a network connecting farmers with food pantries and soup kitchens and launched a now popular CSA in Queens. Throughout this time she was gardening in her backyard in Brooklyn and dreaming about starting a farm. The vision of farming as working towards social goals and as a conscious decision of a way of life is a common thread running through the new farmer movement in this country.

The Greenhorns is a new non-profit organization that works to encourage people like Cara to become farmers. The organization's founder, Severine Von Tscharner Fleming describes the mission of the non-profit in the press release for their documentary film:

> As the nation experiences a groundswell of interest in sustainable lifestyles, we see the promising beginnings of an agricultural revival. Young farmers' efforts feed us safe food, conserve valuable land, and reconstitute communities split apart by strip malls. It is the film maker's hope that by broadcasting the stories and voices of these young farmers, we can build the case for those considering a career in agriculture — to embolden them, to entice them, and to recruit them into farming. Our mission, as a small grass-roots nonprofit based in the Hudson Valley of New York, is to support, promote and recruit young farmers in America. (Greenhorns.net)

Fleming is connected to Roxbury through training as well as vision. She attended the Farm Beginnings Course at Hawthorne Valley Farm, the educational biodynamic farm in Ghent, New York where Jean-Paul worked before starting Roxbury. Hawthorne Valley and Roxbury Farm collaborate often. During my week at Roxbury I saw experimenters from Hawthorne Valley collecting bee data on the farm and participated in a tour given to the Farm Beginnings Course. I had the opportunity to meet Rachel Schneider, the education coordinator at Hawthorne Valley, through my advisor Cathy Stanton's research. Schneider mentioned Fleming's difficulty deciding whether to focus on carrying out the goals of her new non-profit and propelling the new farmer movement, or to farm herself, a decision Cara undoubtedly had to make as well.

That Cara considers farming a way of life and a way to make positive change in the world is as much a reflection of Jean-Paul's employee selection process as it is of her personal history. Over lunch my first day on the farm, Jean-Paul explained his criteria for hiring apprentices. He does not want people who are looking for a fun summer job or who have a romantic idea of what farming is. He wants people who are looking to farm and farm well. He wants to train people in their life's work. To do this, the apprentice programming is set up to foster the development of independent farms, to give apprentices everything they need to be successful as independent farmers.

In the past, this programming has included CRAFT, the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training, which Jean-Paul started in 1994. Although Roxbury no longer participates in CRAFT, over thirty New England farms are members and the model has spread to other regions of the United States.

The farmer training I observed was both personalized and worked into the routine

on the farm. The conversation between Jody and Luke about Cara and Luke's farm business plan on the way to the farmers' house for lunch foregrounded the farm labor conversation I had with Jean-Paul as we ate. Jody insisted upon looking over the plan even in its draft stage. Reviewing the business plan was not the only way Jean-Paul and Jody were helping Cara and Luke get their farm on the ground. Cara and Luke had picked out a prospective location that Jean-Paul was planning to visit with the couple. Similarly, the other two apprentices are raising chickens as a way to practice running their own small business. This practice gives apprentices important farming experience, offers shareholders high quality meat, and improves rotation on the farm.

The general programming at Roxbury Farm is also set up to foster the development of independent farms. While pulling weeds, the task that occupied most of my time while at Roxbury, Cara explained the weekly farm walks that Jean-Paul leads. The walks have specific themes, such as pest identification or the importance of beneficial insects. When Jean-Paul acquired a new piece of land the walk was focused on what to look for when buying a farm and the necessary equipment for the first year of production. The crew also reads books together and sits around to talk about economic ideals and the specifics of farm accounting. At the beginning of the season Jean-Paul asks the farmers what they would be interested in learning about, and that becomes the focus of these discussions. "This isn't normal," Cara said. She explained that most farmers do not provide a structure that allows workers to delve into the skills and theoretical framework needed to run their own farms.

Cara likes the training and the work at Roxbury. Part of the reason why working for Jean-Paul is so great, she explained, is because of his outlook on farm improvements.

Later, Jean-Paul would explain his mentality to me directly, during a farm tour with economics for a topic. That the tour was focused on farm economics and happened to take place during my stay may have been a coincidence, but that both Jean-Paul and Cara mentioned the bin washer probably was not. As we were readying a tractor to use in transplanting collard greens, Cara joked that Jean-Paul is often buying farm equipment to improve efficiency and make life more enjoyable. “We end up with a lot of fun things that normal farms don’t get.” Her excitement for the bin washer was apparent. Everyone dreaded the task of hand-washing the bins used for transporting produce. She was thrilled to send them through this dish-washer like machine instead.

Earlier in the week Shelly also voiced her excitement about farm machinery. Head of the greenhouse operation, Shelly had the volunteers (Patrick, her boyfriend Mike’s cousin and me) and the ladies seeding corn during a downpour (Figure 1). While we used a machine to fill trays with soil (Figure 2), put dents in the little compartments with a large stamp-like device, and place the big, shriveled corn seeds in each small cup, covering them with soil to finish, Shelly seeded basil. With basil’s teeny tiny seeds, the method we used to quickly seed corn would have taken hours. Instead, Shelly used a machine that sounded like an air hockey table, which sucked up individual seeds so her little fingertips did not have to. “Every farm should have one of these,” she said of the $600 set up.

Figure 1: Greenhouse with seedlings at Roxbury

Figure 2: Machine that fills seed trays with soil

Jean-Paul explained the application of his economic philosophy during the farm tour at the end of my stay. Investments can have many different types of returns, Jean-Paul explained. These can be money, some environmental improvement, a quality of life improvement, improved worker safety, or extra time. Sometimes the financial burden has to take a back seat to other improvements that an investment could provide. He used the bin washer as an example. The machine cost about $35,000; if Jean-Paul had crunched the numbers to determine when the machinery would have paid for itself, he knows he would have come to the consensus that the farm could not afford it. However, he knew there would be other returns on his investment.

Twice a year workers and shareholders sit down to discuss what needs improvement on the farm. For four years workers complained about washing bins. Bins are used for packing harvested vegetables and are delivered to one of their 17 distribution locations. The bins sit with leftover vegetable scraps for a week until the next distribution when Roxbury folks pick them up. When the bins make it back to the farm they are smelly and must be washed before re-use. Washing is a frustrating task, hard on the back, and time consuming. For this reason the task was often put off. With the bin washer the

farmers can focus more on the tasks they enjoy.

Similar reasoning led to the installation of washable walls and bright lights in the wash room. The renovations made the room a better working environment, improving quality control. Although the return on both of these investments is hard to calculate, they may be appreciated and noticed by shareholders who could come to associate Roxbury with cleanliness and high quality vegetables. Another investment that was worth the money, but had no monetary returns was the purchase of quick hitches for all of the tractor attachments. The hitches make operating a tractor significantly safer.

The farm improvements that Jean-Paul and Jody finance paint a much brighter picture for laborers than the one imagined by Marx and experienced by many farm workers on modern industrial farms. These workers are not alienated from their labor or treated like cogs in a wheel; instead they are treated with respect, as human beings, and as good farmers in training. Mechanization is utilized selectively, to enhance rather than replace human labor. This was exemplified by a conversation I overheard between Luke and Jean-Paul. Luke had all kinds of questions and ideas about how they could use their existing tractors to new ends, how they could deliver fertilizer more efficiently, and other projects incomprehensible to me because of the technical jargon. Jean-Paul listened intently and responded reassuringly, telling Luke that his ideas were good and thoughtful and then presented complications that could arise if his plans were carried out. This was a conversation between apprentice and guru, farmer and farmer, not between capitalist and laborer, which as Marx explained it, would not have been much of a conversation at all.

Instead of seeing labor as an input to be paid for by profits, or as a commodity

which is bought and sold, farming is a form of human existence to be refined. Jean-Paul builds farmers; he does not use farm labor. Cara revealed this mindset in her discussion of the farm plan that she and Luke drew up. It includes plans to build a family. She described it as a business plan and a life plan. That home economics are supplementary to occupational economics is a reflection of the consideration of farming as a way of life, rather than a way of labor.

"Labor is not an expense," Jean-Paul said to me during our lunch together. Workers should bring in an income so that their salaries do not cost anything. Furthermore, thinking in terms of salaries takes away from the true goal--making farming your living and making a living from farming. This is about a deep, spiritual commitment to the land and to growing food for people. Farm decisions in this paradigm are based on economics, certainly, but also on improving quality of life. Jean-Paul calls this the paradigm of internal success. Instead of defining success by making money, determined externally, internal success is measured by the self, by finding the leader in oneself, and by carrying out your life's work in a way that brings about personal happiness and makes positive change in the world (Courtens 2006).

These sentiments are highly influenced by Steiner and were a major part of Jean-Paul's education at Warmonderhof. In an economics course at Warmonderhof Jean-Paul learned that getting to the essence of farming as a service to others, a way of life, and a contribution to the greater good guarantees success more than marketing models, high production, startup capital, or anything else described by the dominant model of industrial, high-input agriculture. Jean-Paul was taught to not worry about money and instead to worry about becoming a good farmer who serves people. The farmer that truly

serves will never have money problems, he was told. This may seem dangerously optimistic, but Jean-Paul's professors were so confident in this that they urged the students not to save up money to purchase a farm. Farms will be bought for good farmers. "Buy a farm from your savings," one professor said, "and lose it if you don't have the resources to manage it or the connections to sell your products" (Courtens 2006: 4). Build the connections, compile the resources, and farm for others before considering the acquisition of land.

Although Jean-Paul was fortunate to get farmland in this way, he realizes that there is risk in putting too much weight on consumers. For instance, Jean-Paul and Jody have been investing all the farm's profits back into the farm each year, leaving them little for retirement, and even less to fund the construction of new buildings which may be needed to continue the farm's relationship with the Van Buren National Historic Site, a partnership forged by the land trust agreement. Although the land trust agreement offered collective ownership and affordability of the land, it is also causing significant problems for Jean-Paul and Jody as they try to wrestle with the park over conflicting ideas of farming. The park is looking for a more bucolic farm while the farmers are focused on keeping costs down. Shareholders too can have conflicting ideas of farming and how they frame their support for the farm. This is one reason why Jean-Paul and Jody want to keep the price of the share low.

Resistance to increasing the share price as a way to cover more farm expenses is a reflection of the struggle to broaden consumer notions of economy, the dominant version of which assumes self interested motives. In an interview between Cathy Stanton and Jean-Paul and Jody, Jody said, "It is a lot easier to sell 'help us buy new land to grow

vegetables for you' than it is to sell 'help us buy the buildings that we use to make money.'" This tension is apparent in how shareholders conceive of their support by buying a share. A shareholder survey found that people conceived holding a share in the farm as supporting local farmers, but fewer people envisioned this support as "sharing risk." Dick Shirey, the shareholder who administered the survey, described why this might be the case in an interview with me:

> I think the notion of sharing risk strikes people in at least two different ways. Some people think about it as sharing financial risk with the farmer. So when they think of it that way they are almost thinking "Well I'm loaning the farmer money to run the farm and I'm not so sure that is such great idea, even though I want to support the farmer. I'm not sure I like loaning people money." Whereas another way that people think about that is that they are sharing a risk that there is going to be a hail storm and that the share is going to be smaller because some of the produce is going to be damaged, and so they are supporting the farmer but they don't see it as loaning the farmer money they just see themselves as participating in the downside of what might happen to the farm because of the weather or some event.

If consumer notions of sharing risk remain entrenched in capitalist modes of thinking, asking shareholders to pay more for the share may just cause them to disengage. This is the major balancing act of the movement: how to transform consumer conceptions of economy, but not push them so far out of their comfort zones as to make them jump ship. Both the countercuisine and cooperative consumption had problems with this balancing act. However, CSA has something that the countercuisine and cooperative consumption lacked: a way to accommodate capitalist conceptions of economy while also pushing consumers to generate alternative ones.

This re-envisioning starts on the farm by conceiving of food as more than a commodity. In the same way that farming is not just a job for Jean-Paul, food, or really anything that Marx described as a commodity, is not just a thing.

A theory of value for Roxbury Farm CSA: Consumption

As Jean-Paul says in his piece *Biodynamics and Roxbury Farm* (2006), a fireplace is not only a device that generates heat. Fireplaces impart higher value to real estate as much because they are a symbol of togetherness during the holidays, and because of the comfort of the soft crackle of wood and the steady glow of embers, as because of the warmth they provide. Food, similarly, is much more than subsistence. To be a good farmer is to understand the essence of food for consumers. Jean-Paul takes this one step further. Of himself and his classmates he says "We realized that in order to serve the customer well, we needed to gain a better understanding of them as a whole human being." This coming to understand is a two way street. By learning more about the essence of food and farming, and the farming human beings, consumers learn what a fair price truly is and thereby dutifully participate in the process of production.

This, however, is a process. First consumers must begin to consider the share as something more than a commodity. They must begin to value the share not by its use value, but by its essence, by what it brings emotionally, socially, and physically to the human experience. Only then can they start to envision CSA as something other than commodity exchange and the market as something different than Marx described. The goal, ultimately, is a re-envisioning of the economy entirely to consider it associative.

Although Jean-Paul does not envision food as a commodity in the Marxist sense, capitalist market society certainly would. Therefore, the discussion of this re-envisioning must start where consumers start, the capitalist, commodity marketplace. As elaborated at the beginning of this chapter, there is an ordering of spheres of exchange within modern capitalist society. However, even in the moment of exchange when CSA is

definitely a commodity, at least according to Marx, it is a part of a more moral sphere than the general commodity marketplace.

Buying a CSA share is in a more moral sphere of exchange because of the nature of the social distance between transactors. Shareholders may have met the farmers, been to the farm, or understand the whole farm approach. Even if farmer and shareholder have never met, shareholders know their food is grown by a specific farmer or group of farmers, on a specific piece of land, specifically for them. Furthermore, the shareholder puts down money at the beginning of the season, demonstrating a trust not present in the entirely anonymous market economy. No money is traded when the shareholder picks up their share each week, reiterating the morality of this exchange.

After the shareholder pays at the beginning of the season, the share can evolve into something singularized and invaluable. This is true for Roxbury Farm shareholder Dick Shirey. Shirey is an academic economist who is living his economic philosophy. Even before becoming a shareholder and arranging CSA for the Albany Diocese as a part of its Peace and Justice Commission, Shirey saw CSA as an association rather than a market model. As he said during an interview with me, "I realize that while capitalism is the dominant form of economy, and markets are impossible to avoid, there are many different kinds of economic organizations, many different kinds of economic structures way beyond what the text book deals with."

Figure 3: Dick Shirey and me weeding lettuce at Roxbury

Every Wednesday Shirey comes to the farm to pitch in his labor (Figure 3). He also helped out at the farm by writing a shareholder survey, the data from which he is using to write a new theory of supply and demand particular to CSA. He is not the only Roxbury shareholder who considers the price of the share secondary. Others too, want first for the farm to succeed. They want Jean-Paul and the other farmers to succeed and want to support the farm by buying a share. For these people, Shirey says, not being able to afford a share would be so painful that they would give up other things to be able to buy a share. Shareholders who want to support Roxbury Farm think of their relationship to CSA as less market-oriented and more morally and justly defined.

As you can imagine, not every shareholder assigns such cultural value to the share. Some assign no singularized value to the share, seeing the CSA relationship as purely economical. These shareholders have determined that CSA is the best bang for

their buck and exchange money for the share as they would any product at a grocery store. Thus we see a range of singularization and different spheres of exchange within CSA itself, and these are constantly in flux.

As Kopytoff explains, the ideals that govern the valuation of objects are continually reshaped within the individual, between individuals, and across groups such that spheres of exchange are constantly reordered. This order "shifts contextually and biographically as the originators' perspectives, affiliations and interests shift" (Kopytoff 1986: 79). Shirey describes this as especially true in CSA. Although there exists a continuum of shareholders with the bang for buck shareholder on one end and the Dick Shirey-like shareholder on the other, everyone in between and even the poles themselves are in flux. The uniqueness of CSA is that its structure at one allows all types of spheres of exchange and encourages the shift from a more self-interested sphere to a more altruistic one. As Dick Shirey points out, even the members that consider the share to be just a commodity will be presented with opportunities to envision the share as something more. They may have an opportunity to visit the farm, get to know the farmers better through the weekly newsletter, or they may begin to see CSA as doing greater good.

Some of this re-envisioning may happen in the off-season, when shareholders realize what they were missing before participating in CSA. Shirey explains:

> Little bit by little bit [shareholders] realize in the bigger picture they are doing something that is good for the world and they like being a part of that. And the other six months they are getting stuff from Mexico or California and they start realizing "hey this stuff really traveled a long ways and I'm kind of glad I'm not doing this all the time" or they have no choice but to get things that are not making the world so much better. It's the comparison. "I'm part of a picture that is way beyond myself, but I don't like it."

In this way, the longer shareholders are members, the less likely they are to care

about the price of the share and the less they see the share as a commodity in the traditional sense. The less they consider the share to be a commodity, the more value they place in its production and the more they come to consider farming as more than a job, as their farmers do. Shirey describes why time spent as a shareholder is reaffirming: "People are developing a loyalty to the farm and the farmer. They are also changing. It is not just developing a loyalty. Their lifestyle is changing and their way of thinking about their lives is changing in little ways, incremental ways, but it is changing." As soon as shareholders come to see farming as a way of life that their way of life depends upon there is empathy in the market. This can lead to a form of economic reasoning that truly considers others, an associative one. This transformational aspect of CSA is integral to Shirey's theory of demand (Polimeni et al. 2006) and gives CSA the power to broaden relationships of exchange.

However, many of Roxbury's 1,200 CSA members have not been to the farm, do not consider their money to be sharing any risk, and have no intention of transforming our economic system. With Shirey's theory of demand we are left wondering how we can show shareholders the light. This seems an increasingly more difficult task the larger the shareholder base becomes.

Jean-Paul does not see a problem with the size of their membership, arguing that the connections between farmer and shareholder are less important than the connection between shareholder and farm: "Our members are a part of the farm because they want fresh, high quality, organically grown, local produce from a place they can visit" (Courtens 2006:7).

If shareholders do visit, they will see some things outside of the romantic American

construct of a rural farm, including tractors, machinery, and complex irrigation designs. These signs of efficiency and high production, most often associated with industrial farming, can be off-putting to romanticized memories of the past. Cara and Luke even left after their first year at Roxbury, thinking it would be better to start on a smaller, more modest farm. The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, which shares some land with Roxbury, is uncomfortable with the farm's marks of efficiency affecting the historic landscape.

As much as notions of self-interest have to be worked out of shareholders' thinking, so too must notions of the immorality of efficiency. This notion is tied to capitalist modes of thinking, and self-interested profit accumulation. In the industrial system, efficiency is to be found in cheap labor, in the replacement of humans with machines. To Wendell Berry, machines "answer directly the perpetual need of the greedy to get more for less" (Berry 2010: 19). Capitalist definitions of efficiency, Berry argues, have dehumanized our economy and led to the depopulation of our farms and the subsequent decline of good, insightful agriculture that is invested with the human spirit (Berry 2010).

This capitalist efficiency is not efficient at all; in fact Berry calls it "anti-economic" (Berry 2010:19). Anti-economy puts consumption first--it stimulates the economy by stimulating spending. Spending and job creation, however, do not truly stimulate the economy; they create the illusion of limitlessness, of unlimited needs and wants, unlimited wealth, and unlimited resources. Our world and its physical resources are of course, limited. "From an economic point of view," Berry says, "it is wrong to buy anything you do not need….Only in a financial system, an anti-economy, can it seem to make sense to talk about 'what the economy needs'. In an authentic economy, we would

ask what the land and people need" (Berry 2010: 5-6). Thus, Berry provides us with another moral continuum of exchange, which places the land first and consumption last.

In an economy in which the spheres of exchange are properly ordered as Berry suggests, efficiency means careful land and natural resource use. The mechanization at Roxbury Farm is a part of a whole slew of production methods which do not waste natural and human resources and which keep costs down for shareholders. Indeed, keeping costs down for shareholders is a constant incentive for growth.

Even as shareholders may find machines off putting and markers of destructive industrialism, they may also value price as an important factor. This moral dilemma, which measures up one's own ego to that of someone else's, cannot be resolved without a re-envisioning of the notion of self interest. Thus, there is a diversity of contradicting morals and perceptions which affect shareholder decisions and help or limit their ability to see CSA as an alternative to Marxist capitalism.

Ironically, it makes sense that CSAs like Roxbury, which have used economies of scale to limit costs for shareholders, would be able to maintain shareholders long enough to start changing conceptions of economy. On the other hand, the very scale that provides Roxbury with economic staying power may stand in the way of breaking down self-interested modes of reasoning.

Communion Supported Agriculture at The Farm School CSA

Community: An economic definition

Maggie's Farm looks much more to scale for the idyllic rural farm than Roxbury does. The old white farm house has dorms and big dining room picnic tables for the student farmers, adults who come to The Farm School for a year's training in sustainable agriculture and homesteading. Up front is a home garden, behind that some raspberry bushes and permanent cold frames for germinating field seeds. The gazebo meeting spot is for seeding, delegating tasks, and talking over schedules. The farm is a discontinuous USDA-protected 130 acres in Athol, Massachusetts, which provides the Boston area with organic produce, eggs, and meat through CSA and farmers markets.

Although just down the road at Sentinel Elm Farm, where The Farm School's summer programming and Visiting Schools Program takes place, is lively with lunch, the student farmers and I sit quietly and eat spread out along the benches that are too big for the group of us. The Visiting Schools Program is the hallmark of The Farm School. The organization's name is recognizable by thousands of students and their parents for that reason. The program was started in 1989 with the founding of the organization.

The mission at The Farm School has remained unchanged from its start—to offer experiential, tactile learning to students who were missing it from their lives. Ben Holmes, The Farm School's founder, was an apprentice teacher for a brief time at Shady Hill School, a progressive, private, day school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He realized that the kids there were missing something profound, a key part of a healthy education—the invigorating essence of useful work. Holmes had this experience as a young man on his uncle's farm and it changed his outlook on the world.

Students in the Visiting Schools Program come out to Athol with their conventional classes, staying for a couple of days to volunteer on the farm. I did not have a chance to participate in the Visiting Schools Program, but did spend some time with the adolescents of the last session of The Farm School's summer programming. These 8th to 10th grade students milked and tended to cows and goats, gardened, collected eggs, learned some carpentry, cooked, cleaned, preserved, did yoga, and participated in forestry, among other activities. The vision of kids, especially city kids, doing real work on a farm generates nostalgia, patriotism, and confidence in the future; "it just fills you up in a lovely way," says Holmes of the feeling. The Farm School has no doubt mobilized this imagery to invigorate their support base.

Each year they do a photo fundraising mailing to show their supporters the change they are making for otherwise ungrounded youngsters. One year they sent out twelve postcard pictures of young, diverse kids holding chickens, milking a cow, or using a saw. Each card had a motivational line. "Celebrating work," "making connections," "awakening to nature," "tending to others," "working together," "building a future." Together, the back of the cards formed a map of the farm.

The future the post cards and the organization paint sure has a lot in common with the idealized past, a time when people lived and worked on farms, had place-based connections, and meaningful interactions with the natural world. This is a past of neighborliness, of communities of dependence and cooperative exchange, of industriousness and thrift.

Jack Kittredge introduces his piece "Community-supported Agriculture: Rediscovering Community" with Wendell Berry, who argues that relationships of mutual

dependence are the stuff of community, “Community's not a sentiment. It has to do with necessity--with people needing each other. If you allow the larger industrial system to remove the pattern of needs that is the force holding people together, then you lose the community” (Berry 1994 in Kittredge 1996: 253).

In “Defining Normative Community” John Cobb explains that this is exactly why community has declined in the name of capitalism. The freedom from responsibility for others was described by Adam Smith, through whose popular economic theory individualism has taken hold of our society and our economic system, reproducing the ideal of individualism through self-interested market relations. Thus Cobb argues “Consumerism expresses not freedom, but slavery to purely material values” (Cobb 1996: 186).

The value that is lost in this pseudo individualism is the dependency on others and their dependency on you. Kittredge writes “The rise of nation-states and the victory of industrial over artisan-based production have stripped away many of the connections that average people had to place and to one another” (Kittredge 1996: 254). These connections are often romanticized, but at their core represent ways that social relationships have provided people with the basic material needs of their existence. What industrial capitalism has stripped away is more personal and more appropriately scaled market connections.

Wendell Berry describes how this stripping away is related to scale. When a national bank chain comes into a local community and buys out the independent bank, the consideration of whether or not to grant loans excludes the personal relationship between farmer and banker. Instead, the farmer is typed into a system that analyzes risk.

"Old and once-valued customers now find that they are known by category rather than character" (Berry 1996: 77), Berry writes. Utterly market-driven, this economy disregards the value of social relationships.

The existence of an economy means we are mutually dependent on one another. Increased scale, the pervasiveness of self-interest, and the disregard of human and natural considerations in our present economy has fooled many consumers into believing they depend on no one in particular, that they are not responsible for any particular mode of production. This lack of accountability in the marketplace is destructive to community and the environment for it creates a false consciousness in which people "are free to live where they want, do what they want, create their own norms and values" (Cobb 1996: 185), when in reality, people are dependent on where they live and must answer to the norms and values that are created through the production and consumption that makes up their existence. Our market system masks our dependencies. Through fetishization, it forgets the people on whom consumers rely and the land on which all wealth is ultimately based.

Community is the acknowledgement of mutual need, the acceptance of responsibility, and the providing of material and social needs in association with others. If community is formed through more personal market connections and acknowledging relationships of dependence, then community formation can only happen within certain kinds of economic formations, which the relationships of industrial capitalism do not fulfill.

Miranda Joseph argues this in her book *Against the Romance of Community.* For her, community production happens through the market, though community is often seen

as existing in opposition to the market and somehow outside of it. Joseph calls this market-free version of community romantic. Romantic community is constructed through shared morals and sentiment, not through a convergence of political or economic ideals. (Joseph 2002: 1-29). Through a romantic construction of community as the salvation from capitalism, it is rendered the other pole to modernity and the solution to modernity's problems. In this way it is freed from influence by political or economic processes, even as these processes may have played profound roles in creating the problems to be solved.

Moreover, this romanticized definition denies the power of political or economic processes to generate community. Joseph sees community as supplementary to capitalism, constituted and performed through it rather than arising from it independently. Elaborating on Marx's theory of value, Joseph argues that products acquire value in production, consumption, and exchange through social relations. These social relationships arise out of capitalism, participating in its evolution and also serving it. Community-identified businesses, such as a "lesbian repair shop…are examples of production and distribution sites that facilitate the flow of capital by organizing themselves on the basis of, and thus producing, the community with which the business is identified. They become the site and structure through which the community enacts its very existence" (Joseph 2002:54).

Unlike the romantic construction of community that Joseph unpacks, CSA was founded as a way to generate community through the market. This community was designed to acknowledge needs and dependency on one another and the environment. However, not all CSAs bring out these relationships of dependence. A false sense of dependency and accountability is pervasive in our society (Ehrenfeld 1996), so much so

that it would be naïve to not think it exists in CSA as well. This is because we have a longing for the connections our market system breaks, but also a tenacious hold on the conveniences of modern life (Pollan 2006:137).

This dilemma was illustrated by the growth of the organic sector, which advertises an idyllic version of rural agriculture, but does not stand up to that representation nor forge real connections between producers and consumers. Connections over the web or through advertising may generate a sense of togetherness, but they do not reveal or create relationships of true dependence on which existence rests.

Social media and what Rachel Botsman calls collaborative consumption (Botsman and Rogers 2010) certainly generate a sense of togetherness, even accountability to some extent, but dependency, no. In "In Search of Community" Philip Selznick differentiates community from communion. "Communion is a psychic unity, whereas community embraces a range of activities and associations…communities are defined by structural differentiation as well as by shared consciousness. These structures are sustained by ongoing, interdependent activities, not by symbolic expression alone" (Selznick 1996: 201). The structural form of community is a web of dependency, such that its goal is to work out egoism in the name of collective reciprocity. In other words, the goal of community is to generate a more associative form of economic relationships (Selznick 1996).

A quote from Cobb shows that the work of community can only be done by an invigoration of local economy:

> The amount of significant power that can be exercised at the local level depends largely on the nature of the economy. If we continue on the road to a globally centralized economy, then this proposal for community-oriented reconstruction of the political process can be of minimal value. If we move instead toward a

> decentralized economy in which relatively small regions are relatively self-sufficient, then the political power exercised in such regions will be significant (Cobb 1996: 192).

This is true for Wendell Berry as well, who sees a good local community as inseparable from and unattainable without local economy, which is based on cooperative market relationships and a truly economic and respectful relationship with the Earth (Berry 1996: 76-84).

The Farm School has never been engaged in the local economy of Athol, Massachusetts where it sits. It is instead tied to the market in many complex and indirect ways, while to some extent furthering nostalgic and individualistic visions of farming and community. The Farm School utilizes the Cambridge economy through its relationships with Cambridge schools and parents, donors, board members, and restaurants. About half of The Farm School's budget is donated. At the start of CSA nearly all of their members were somehow connected with the schools with whom they already worked. This year's mid-season survey found that 40% of shareholder families had participated in other programming at The Farm School before buying a share. The Farm School is not connected to the Athol community and economy, but it has formed a relatively local economic loop with the communities it serves. It is important to note that without a low income share option, only some of the urban school communities can participate in their CSA. That being said, The Farm School is still furthering the regional distribution of food and involving urbanites in an ecologically sound, rural economy. That economy, however, exists within a framework of capitalist ideals.

Ben Holmes describes The Farm School experience as simple, apolitical and purely experiential. **"**Our great strength is that we aren't abstract. If kids are attaching

themselves to this place, it's because it's this place, not some generalized concept or farm. It's because they love the people that are here and the work they are doing." That kids love the farm has been demonstrated by positive news coverage over the years, but The Farm School does not totally evade abstraction. The useful work that The Farm School creates for kids is not supported by an economy that values useful work, or better said, The Farm School is not a working part of a type of economy that values useful work.

In describing what the people of the party of the local community know to be true Wendell Berry says, "They know that work ought to be necessary; it ought to be good, it ought to be satisfying and dignifying to the people who do it, and genuinely useful and pleasing to the people for whom it is done" (Berry 1996: 80). Necessary work is work that satisfies a human need. Economically, payment for that work is a byproduct of the needed service that has been provided. Needed work need not be subsidized because it is the real work that provides the material needs of existence. The party of the local economy has two goals, which Berry describes as "the preservation of ecological diversity and integrity, and the renewal on sound cultural and ecological principles, of local economies and local communities" (Berry 1996: 81).

A lasting conception of individualism

The Practical Farm Training Program was started in response to an influx of employee applicants who were more interested in farming than in kids and education. Those people were not hired, but left a mark on Holmes and another Farm School staffer that there was a market out there for farmer training. The adult program started as a homesteading school, a place where students could learn self-reliance and confidence. The program was modeled in part after Holmes' experience on his uncle's farm. It was

designed to “compress in a year what your family would do for you, what they would want to make sure you knew how to do.” However, they quickly realized that it would be better to teach the skills needed to run a commercial farm, so that the graduates could make a living. This is a capitalist ideal of individualism and doing well for yourself, not what a thriving farm-based economy is all about, which is mutual support. Surely, a farm family would teach its children how to participate in the local community and the importance of local economy. With its focus on education, The Farm School leaves this piece out.

The adult program teaches a diverse set of homesteading and farming skills (Figure 4). Adult student farmers study carpentry, forestry, animal husbandry, home gardening, tractor use and maintenance, welding, food preservation, beekeeping, marketing, land agreements, and more as well as participating in CRAFT.

Figure 4: Adult student farmers at The Farm School learning timber framing

Jennifer Core, then the director of the Practical Farm Training Program, explained to me in an interview the importance of keeping the student farmers on the farm and learning rather than managing relationships with the shareholders. Organizing volunteer days for such a big group of people would use up the instructors' time "managing these relationships and not training students." Indeed, keeping students on the farm was one reason why they began CSA.

The main impetus for starting CSA, however, was to follow the market trend. Many small farms were starting CSA and it seemed like a simpler and more viable model to teach students than selling to restaurants and at farmers markets. Added benefits of CSA were fewer drop points and money up front. CSA was adopted to show students that they could make money in sustainable farming. Part of this money making in sustainable farming was the correct identification of market. Athol, with its low average income, was not the area for The Farm School. Their market was in Cambridge and Boston, the areas they were already serving with their Visiting Schools Program and summer programming, the areas with higher income levels, and the people who were interested in a convenient CSA rather than a community based one.

This market seems to be supplying the CSA with shareholders, but what is it teaching the farmers? That what they do on the farm is more important than the market relationships that give that very work value. The on-farm education is standing in the way of teaching what makes up cooperative economic relationships. What they are learning on the farm is that its existence does not depend on the shareholders, the local community, or the local economy. Jamie, an adult student farmer, illustrates this masking of dependency relationships by education that happens at The Farm School. She is talking to me about

the Big Pig Gig, an annual event and fundraiser held at the pricey Cambridge restaurant Henrietta's Table.

Jamie was frustrated that some of the donors at the event were not terribly familiar with the CSA. Knowing that most people picture the Visiting Schools Program when they think of The Farm School, she voiced her support of the education non-profit backing the CSA. On the other hand, she said, the kids are not the people growing the food for shareholders. In a later conversation Jamie expressed her concern about the general lack of shareholder involvement at The Farm School. Jamie had loved her time talking with shareholders during the on-farm distribution at the Weston CSA Land Sake, a farm she called magical. Jamie wondered if shareholders that never come to the farm, like at The Farm School, would be willing to buy the land if necessary. While this is of pressing concern for many CSAs, it seems like The Farm School has nothing to worry about—the land was secured before CSA even started. However, this land security masks the dependency shareholders have on the farm and provides the farmers with a false sense of security, the sense that they can exist without their shareholders.

Indeed, the farm has never existed for shareholders or to provide others with their need for food. It exists to teach farming, or more accurately, that experiential, tactile learning is important to the human soul. Not all student farmers pursue a life in farming after their year at The Farm School. To Holmes this is okay, even good. He likes the idea of people bringing what they learned at The Farm School into diverse professions, especially teaching. The farmer training program then, is not about training people in their life's work.

The farm exists because of donations and because of the $12,500 tuition of each

of the student farmers, not because of economic need. This is demonstrated in the efficiency of work I experienced in the fields at The Farm School. The Farm School had the same number of workers as Roxbury on half the acreage. Harvesting beets with a team of five, including me, was lackadaisical. After finishing, we spent more time snacking on the nearby raspberry bushes than we had on the harvest job, which I could not complain about. The Farm School does not depend on land use efficiency or paying close attention to costs because of their funding structure.

The educators have had to make a conscious effort to keep track of their finances so they can teach economy to the student farmers, even though the changes, such as an increase in seed costs, which would throw a normal farmer through a loop have no effect on The Farm School. In a standard CSA, increased seed cost would be passed along, at least in part, to shareholders, because of the agreement to share risk between them. Because of its funding support, the Farm School does not have to share the risk with shareholders, so they are letting the shareholders carry less of the risk. That the farm does not depend on the shareholders is reiterated in the farmer education, which does not emphasize the importance of cooperative economic relationships.

Because of the funding structure and nonprofit status at The Farm School, they are shielded to a degree from the general commodity marketplace, on which most CSA farmers, unfortunately, rely. Share price is largely determined by outside market forces that dictate the cost of seeds, fertilizer, equipment, boxes, gas, etc. Alleviating some of the pressure associated with buying these inputs is one way non-profit status can help farms survive. Likewise, keeping the price of the share low and not needing as much financial support from shareholders may help keep them on board. So at the same time

as The Farm School's nonprofit status provides them with staying power in the market, it permits them developing more robust cooperative relationships with their shareholders, one of the goals of which is to cultivate long term commitments from consumers.

The farmer education The Farm School provides is anti-economic. Farmer education can and should pay for itself through the satisfaction of consumer needs. However, the farmer education at The Farm School is much different than at Roxbury. Student farmers learn a more diverse range of skills that are systematically evaluated. Student farmers also have the opportunity to participate with the rest of the organization and so receive training in farm-based education as well as in farming itself. The breadth of the farmer training is evidenced by the diverse projects student farmers go on to after their time at The Farm School, most of which involve food system work though often outside of farming. Farmer training at The Farm School is less about building farmers for life and more about teaching people the skills, framework, and understanding needed to engage in sustainable agriculture and farm-based education.

The Farm School demands that experiencing life textually is of utmost importance. Why are experiential and textured lessons so valuable? Holmes explains the many years of unwavering mission at The Farm School:

> The whole basis of our intellect and certainly our sense of poetry is based on touching, seeing, smelling. That might not have been as important--the poetry, the smell of a cow's breath--might not have been as important twenty years ago as it is for the culture that exists now. The idea of having someone put their hand up to a cow and feed it grain is the same now as it was 20 years ago but the need for it is more.

Farm-based experiential learning teaches kindness and a respect for other creatures and for one another. It also teaches the limits of human work, as much of farming lies outside of human control.

We need these values the most in our economy. For it is without them that our economy has taken over our social relations of dependency. The tactile past that The Farm School tries to bring to life is degraded by the framework of individualism rather than mutual dependence. CSA at The Farm School exists for a different reason than why it was started in this country. It exists at The Farm School to teach people how they could make money as farmers, while it was created to teach how relationships of mutual dependence can provide farmers with a living. However, that does not necessarily mean The Farm School pulls CSA too far out of shape. The organization supports some of the ideals of CSA from a different angle, from education rather than production and consumption.

Community vs. Convenience

I stayed on the farm in a building they call the horse barn because it used to be one. Now, the barn serves as a meeting place for the summer camp and Visiting Schools Program. Every morning after breakfast and yoga the campers came in for "big ups" and their mother hen, father rooster groups. During big ups, compliments are given to specific people, "Thanks to Tommy for saving me a sandwich when I missed lunch," for example. Mother hen, father rooster groups have three or four youngsters and a counselor. These are support groups, sometimes themed, and sometimes an opportunity for free conversation.

One floor above these bonding group meetings is an office with a futon bed, where I stayed. The room was stacked with Farm School shirts, bags, old newsletters, brochures, photo fundraising projects, and more. I immediately liked the cream colored shirt with the orange and peach rooster. I would see one of the college-aged counselors

wearing this 2010 Big Pig Gig shirt almost every day I was there. Another shirt features a fist grasping the "radical radish"; it states "Farm School."

Maybe seeing all that merchandise made me hyper-aware of the shirts on the campers, but they were revealing nevertheless. During my time at Sentinel Elm I saw shirts declaring vegetarianism, localism, and that the wearer was a farmer. I found it interesting that the kids wanted to declare their stance in such an allegedly apolitical environment. Of course, the food movement is far from apolitical and if it were the kids would not be wearing those shirts. The shirts represent the hipness of romanticizing rural and agricultural life, which is often associated with the past, and that the re-invigoration of local and moral ideals is a social movement. They show that these highly contested and important concepts have entered the vocabulary of some youth. However, the shirts also represent the trappings of that romanticized past within our capitalist economy. The shirt that read "Support Local" was from Urban Outfitters, "Proud to Farm" from American Eagle, both companies with far away farms and factories. The shirts are another case like the organic movement: a way to make people feel like they are a part of more robust connections, while denying them in production.

The Farm School's market style distribution can also be seen in this light. Much like a farmers market, produce is set up on tables that a Farm School representative stands behind (Figure 5). Shareholders come to the site, which is in the parking lot of Iggy's Bread of the World, a bakery in Cambridge, and pack their own shares. They are allowed a specific number of items each week, but can choose whichever they would like. The produce is arranged beautifully, the greens constantly sprayed with water to maintain turgidity, and a stack of newsletters is positioned under a rock. When

shareholders arrive, they are welcomed, reminded to take a newsletter, and told how many items they can take. Sometimes there are two for one deals and sometimes there are special items with limits. In general, shareholders are free to take what they would like, leaving out what they do not, usually bok choy, collard greens, turnips, and radishes.

Figure 5: Market style distribution for The Farm School at Iggy's Bread in Cambridge, MA.

Before adopting the market style distribution for one of their sites, The Farm School distributed like most CSAs: through boxes that are filled with whatever the farm is growing. What is in the box is based on consumer preference to some degree, but not specifically. With the boxed setup consumers have to get creative, learn how to cook new things, and let loose the reins of control, putting the land before consumer preference.

The market style distribution takes CSA, which usually takes away choices, disregards particular tastes, and changes routines, forcing shareholders to reconfigure their conceptions of need and convenience, and transforms it into a more user friendly form, more in line with the standard shopping experience. The market style distribution is

a way for The Farm School to be successful in, rather than transforming, capitalist economic exchanges.

This does not have to be all bad. Inconvenience is a major reason offered by consumers that choose not to participate in CSA (Ross 2005). Other perceived negative aspects of CSA that the market style distribution evades include not knowing what will come in the share and too much quantity (Ross 2005). Some Farm School shareholders indicated that they would not participate in the CSA if it were not for the market style distribution.

Core sees consumer retention as the most challenging part of maintaining CSA. She finds symbolic value in CSA, in that it makes people feel like they are a part of a movement, but she also believes that CSA is not very sustainable for consumers that have been conditioned to like choice and convenience. People really have to change their relationship to food to be able to maintain CSA, Core said. However, The Farm School does not play a role in changing shareholder perceptions. Their food is valued based on its quality to price ratio, Core says—"shareholders are either happy with the product or not." This is because their model is more similar to a grocery store, more anonymous, than other CSAs. In this anonymous exchange, value is not attributed based on the social relationships between farmer and shareholder, but based on the use value of the product itself.

With the move to the market style distribution, exchange became a little less anonymous, but a little more like the grocery store. With a Farm School representative there to talk with shareholders about farm happenings, future shares, recipes, etc., shareholders feel closer to the farm and closer to other shareholders. This was evidenced

by the lively conversation at the distributions. Some shareholders would hang around for a half hour to chat with me and Kim, the face of The Farm School at the market distribution site, to talk about how to get through some of the items they are not familiar with or do not like as much, to share experiences on farms, or discuss agriculture in general. The feeling at the distribution is the symbolic expression of community. However, a lack of structural dependency between farmers and shareholders makes what is generated at the drop point more like communion than like community. Furthermore, The Farm School is generating this communion in congruence with a more self-interested distribution model, which orders the consumer economy first--the exact opposite goal of community according to Selznick (1996).

Not surprisingly, it is not that cut and dry. Although symbolic, the camaraderie at the market distribution likely encourages people to continue to be members and support the organization. It also arguably brings shareholders closer to the land economy than does box style distribution, since shareholders are hearing about challenges on the farm and offering constant preference feedback so the farmers can modify what they grow. Based on the choices at the distribution, farmers will see what produce items people may not have been eating and grow less of it. The new form of distribution may also keep the shareholders on board that are not ready for dependency relationships in the market. It may convince otherwise reluctant people to become members. It is also an expression of the farmers and shareholders working together since the idea emerged out of shareholder desires to connect more with the farm.

When asked on a shareholder survey about their impressions of the market style distribution, respondents liked it overwhelmingly because of the choice it offered and

because of the opportunity to talk with a Farm School representative and other shareholders. This communion is reiterated by the work the organization does, and that CSA membership is described as participating in that mission. To most survey respondents farmer training is the most important aspect of The Farm School's mission. Yet the shareholders represent a gap in that training. Supporting local farmers was the number one reason why shareholders signed up for the CSA, when really, shareholders do not support the farmers, who are paying their own way. Instead, the shareholders are funding one of the many tools needed to teach successful farming. CSA at The Farm School is a way to participate in education rather than in sustaining farmers.

The Farm School employee, who does the hard work of the distribution, is analogous to the organic label. She creates a great face for The Farm School. She is kind, knowledgeable, and quick, with an attention to detail and an eye for presentation. She represents the thriving community back on the farm. However, with the student farmers not learning the economic dependency of community, Kim represents the inability of the CSA to stand up to the ideals of the movement's founders. CSA at The Farm School is just another way to get (local, organic) food, with the added bonus of monetary support for a non-profit education organization. In large part, this is how shareholders envision their participation in the CSA and the market The Farm School identified to serve through CSA. Not fulfilling the economic definition of community helps The Farm School remain successful in the economy.

A more economic definition of community may emerge from the work The Farm School does outside of the CSA. It is not hard to believe Holmes' argument for how The Farm School could help transform the food economy, though that is not an explicit goal

of the organization. Kids who have a real farm in their hearts, who have experienced the hard work of weeding and chopping wood, who have felt a cow's breath and pulled its udders, are likely to approach the food economy from a different perspective and with more empathy than kids who spent no time on a farm. With their focus outside of economic relationships, The Farm School may cause conceptual change that indirectly supports the goals of CSA's founders. In the balancing act between economic staying power and conceptual change, The Farm School has found a comfortable spot maintaining capitalist definitions of exchange, but is also cultivating an experience-based paradigm shift that may contribute to cooperative economics.

Conclusion: The Shape of CSA to Come

As I said in the introduction, this was a very personal subject for me. It became even more personal at The Farm School. The reason why I knew about The Farm School at all was because I found it on the web and was hoping to attend their Practical Farm Training Program after college. I loved it when I went there. The people were immensely kind and unassuming. When I went with Kim to the market distributions I felt like I could do her job for a living.

The Farm School folks were so interested in my work and how it could help them that I did not want to disappoint or offend them. Even more, I did not want to create divisions in the movement. Although this analysis has shown that CSA fulfills its founders' goals to varying degrees, it has also shown that all CSAs are great market models because in all of them at least some of the risk is shared. That being said, a lot of risk lies with CSA's lasting dependency on the market economy and consumer comparisons to market prices, choices, and convenience. In order for CSA to be successful conceptions of economy must change, farms must work towards closed loop and more localized farm economics to reduce dependency on the market, and CSA must remain an attractive alternative to conventional food distribution methods.

This thesis has shown how the balancing act between remaining viable in the market and changing conceptions of market relations is layered, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. However, if both of these components are on the table the CSA movement can grow organically. As we have seen with The Farm School, it may matter less how the scale is tipped and more that these concepts have been internalized to some extent.

Finding ways to internalize the concepts among shareholders and introducing them to CSA's "community of practice" is especially important. The concept of the land economy, the whole farm approach, and associative economy are all seed ideas that can help consumers and farmers collaborate to work out the kinks in CSA. One glaring kink is the tension between community and capitalism, scale and efficiency. In order for CSA to be a force in the economy it must assume "a greater sense of efficiency in relation to farm scale…so that farms can meet the needs of the community in a healthy economical manner" (Lamb 1994: 9). Long term sustainability for CSA depends in part on increasing land use efficiency as well as changing the anti-community underpinnings of terms like efficiency and large-scale. Obviously, conceptions of community must also come to include economics. These conceptual changes can be brought about through broadening the types and increasing the efficiency of communication among farmers, between farmers and shareholders, and among shareholders.

With *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Michael Pollan reinvigorated a focus on process that the countercuisine had invoked. Even more, he exposed the workings of the industrial food system in a way that inspired action and convinced many people to seek out closer communication with farmers (as well as with cultural cuisines, cookbooks, and fellow eaters). He showcased important concepts like industrial agriculture, concentrated animal feeding operations, polyculture, and big organic. Michael Pollan and Joel Salatin, the grass farmer Pollan presents as the alternative to industrial farming, have become celebrity names in the foodie world.

Direct quotes from Salatin bring up many of the issues in this thesis. A charismatic and rhetorically savvy farmer with hard values and a real knack for

persuasion, Salatin connects the dots in the whole industrial economy, grouping together fertilizer companies, Whole Foods, and Wal Mart. Farmers like him and people who buy their food directly from real, sustainable farmers are what he calls "non-Barcode people" (Pollan 2006: 241). Few people are truly non-Barcode, even CSA farmers, who rely on outside sources for seeds, fertilizer, and other inputs. CSA shareholders rely on Barcodes even more than their farmers for food items not distributed in their CSA or for extra produce in times of destructive weather and pest outbreaks. Moving towards autonomy from the industrial marketplace through more closed loop farm practices and diversifying the products distributed through CSA are important areas for growth.

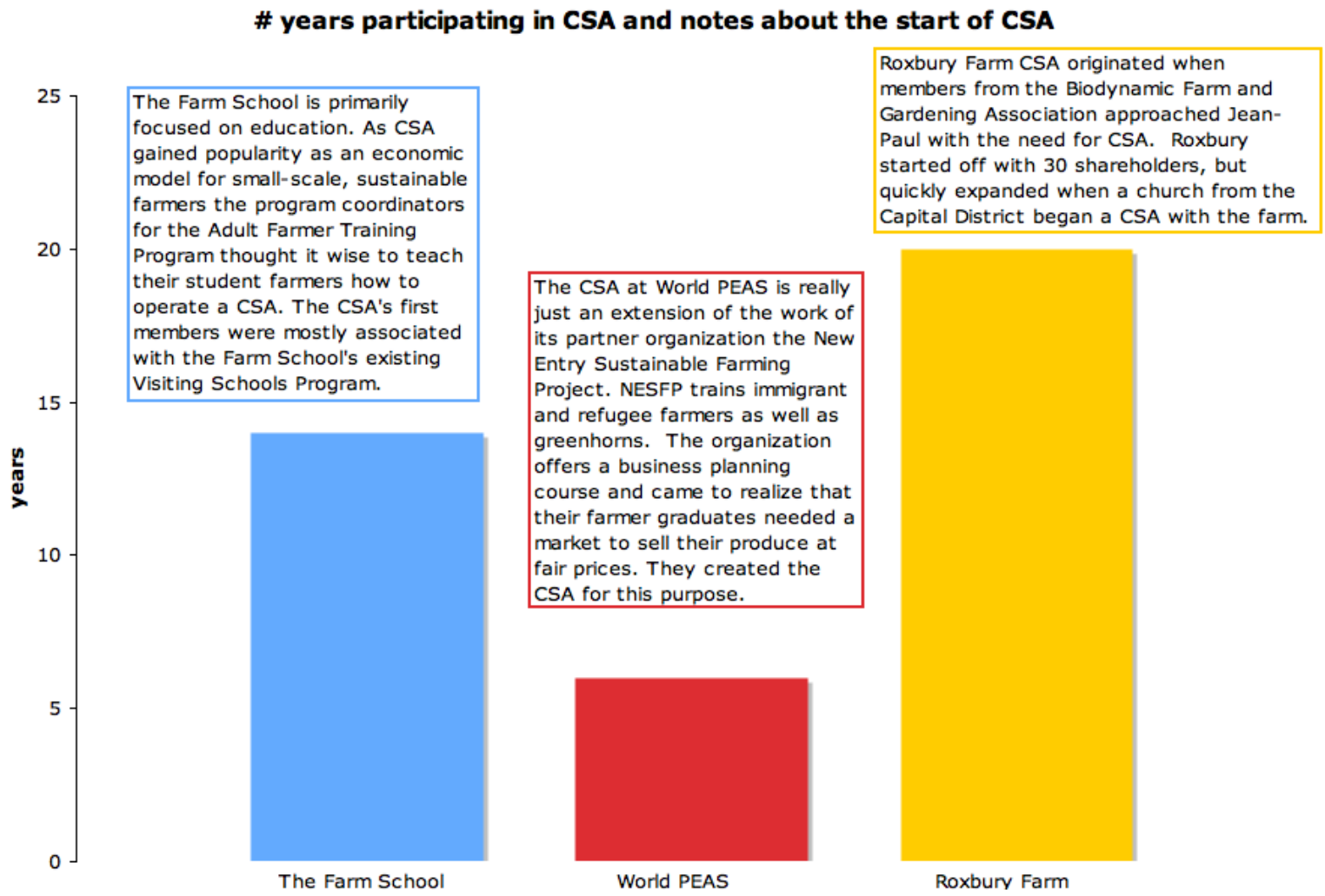
When asked if food enterprises like his could overturn our industrialized food system Salatin said, "We don't have to beat them…I'm not even sure we should try. We don't need a law against McDonald's or a law against slaughterhouse abuse—we ask for too much salvation by legislation. All we need to do is empower individuals with the right philosophy and the right information to opt out en mass" (Pollan 2006: 260). What I have shown, however, is that perhaps even more than empowering people to opt out it is about changing philosophies and effectively distributing the right information.

Consumption can be seen as a form of communication among shareholders and participation in CSA contributes to the "community of practice" encouraging its growth. I am back to where I started, the question of whether individuals and groups can change the way food is grown and distributed in this country. Salatin certainly seems to believe that people can buy their way through politics. I too think that consumption can play a big role in transforming the food system, but learning from social movements of the past, we should not put too much weight on consumption and must envision consumption as

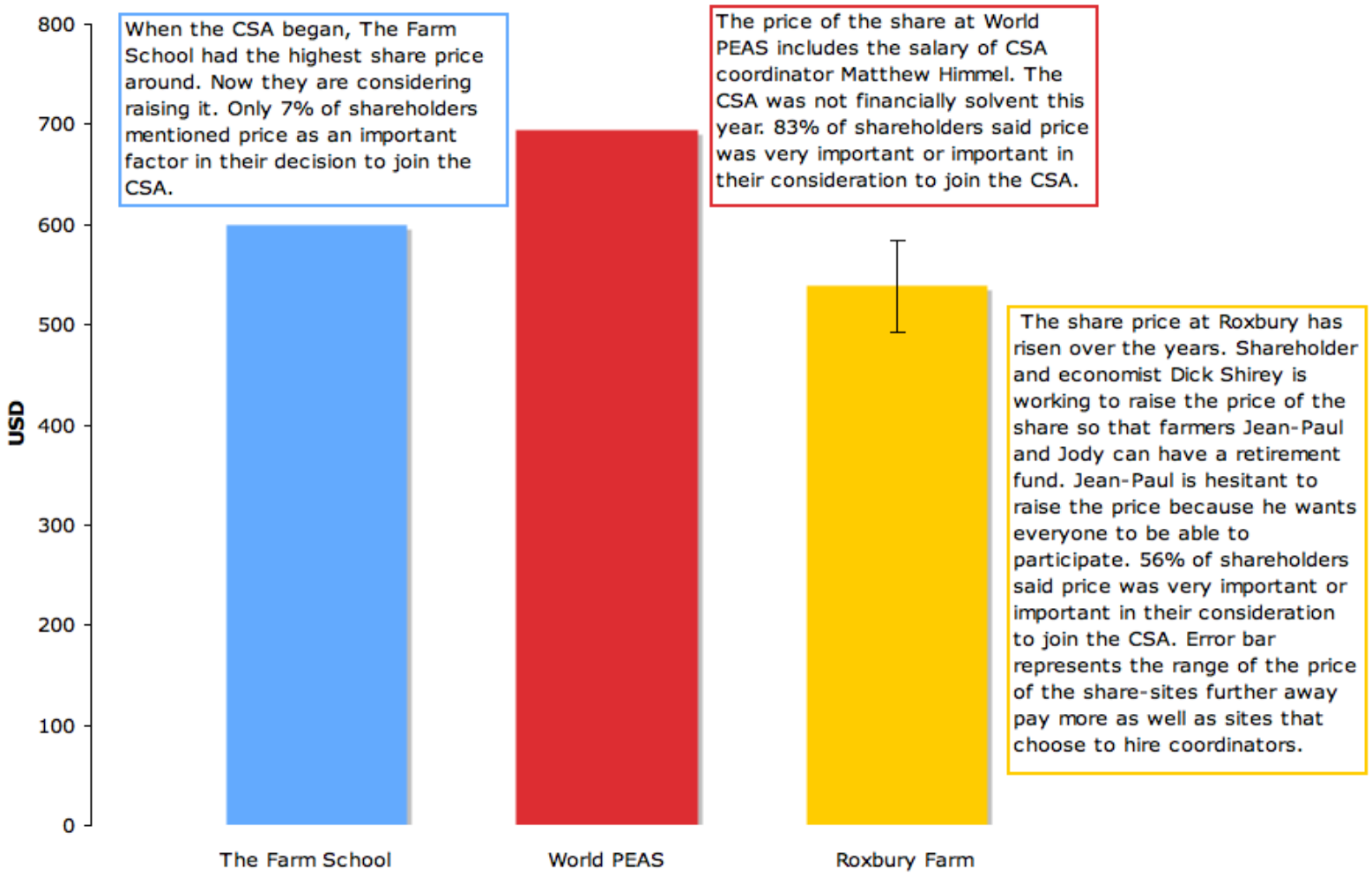
something more than capitalist market exchanges. To be effective, the politics of consumption must also be a politics of production and of exchange relationships.

I would not want people arguing about what is or what is not CSA, though it is clear that the concept could deviate far from its founder's envisioning. Everything that could be called CSA should, to spread the word that it exists and that communities support agriculture. If the term goes corporate a better marketing approach will as well. Maybe a better way to look at this is that slowly but surely, industry and capitalism are making positive change. They are dragging their heels and kicking and screaming, and going in their own way, and they must be constantly pushed and those pushing efforts must be constantly reevaluated to see if they measure up. But, if industry and capitalism can grow $11 billion of organic food, that surely is not as bad as the alternative. What is important, now and in the end, is in which community you support agriculture and how you engage in its production.

Appendix: Figures from Summer Scholars Poster Session

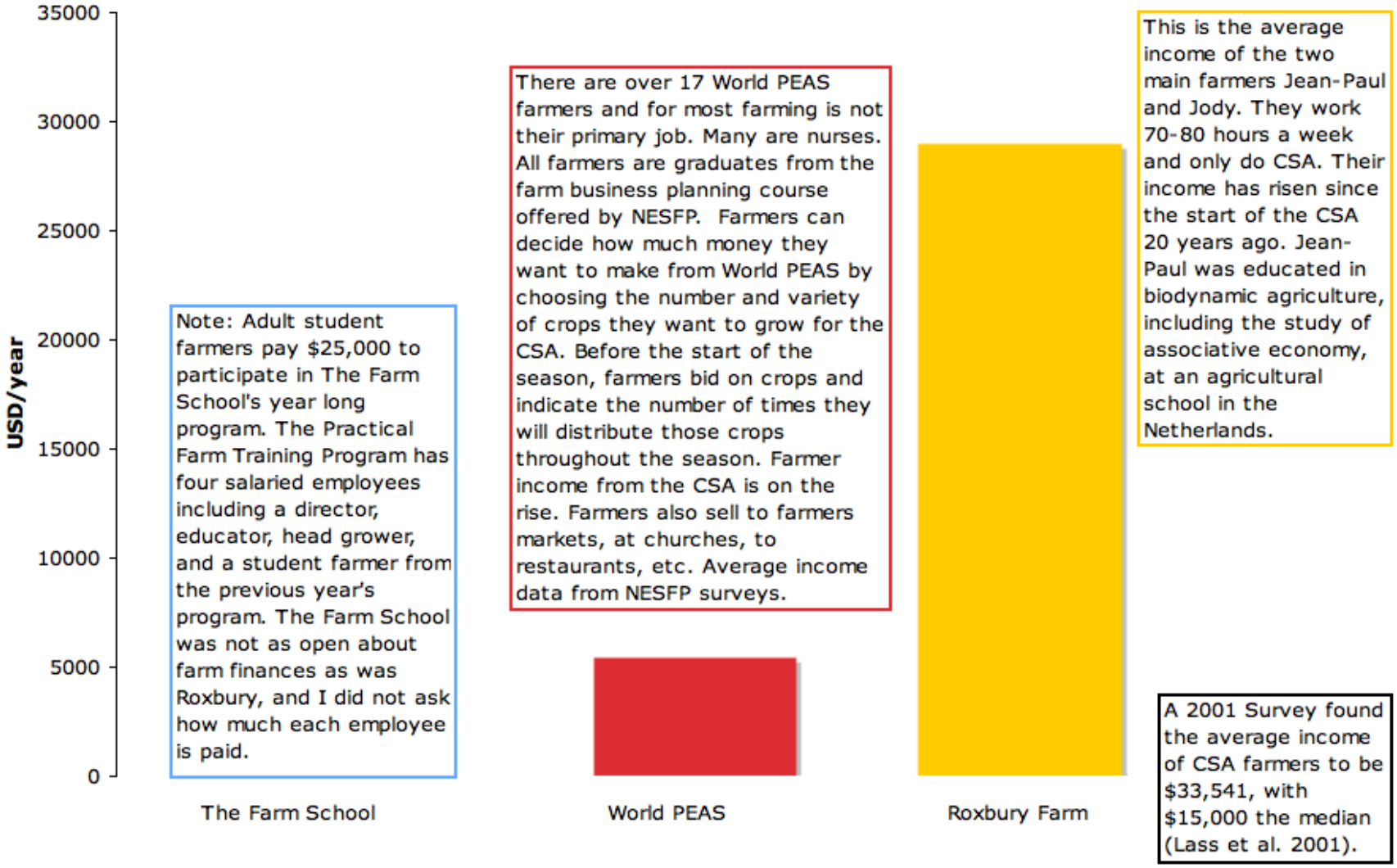

years participating in CSA and notes about the start of CSA
years
25
20
15
10
5
0
The Farm School is primarily focused on education. As CSA gained popularity as an economic model for small-scale, sustainable farmers the program coordinators for the Adult Farmer Training Program thought it wise to teach their student farmers how to operate a CSA. The CSA's first members were mostly associated with the Farm School's existing Visiting Schools Program.
The CSA at World PEAS is really just an extension of the work of its partner organization the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. NESFP trains immigrant and refugee farmers as well as greenhorns. The organization offers a business planning course and came to realize that their farmer graduates needed a market to sell their produce at fair prices. They created the CSA for this purpose.
Roxbury Farm CSA originated when members from the Biodynamic Farm and Gardening Association approached Jean-Paul with the need for CSA. Roxbury started off with 30 shareholders, but quickly expanded when a church from the Capital District began a CSA with the farm.
The Farm School
World PEAS
Roxbury Farm

Share price and notes about the prices of the share



Acres Per Shareholder, Land Use and Security

Average farmer compensation and notes about farmer work



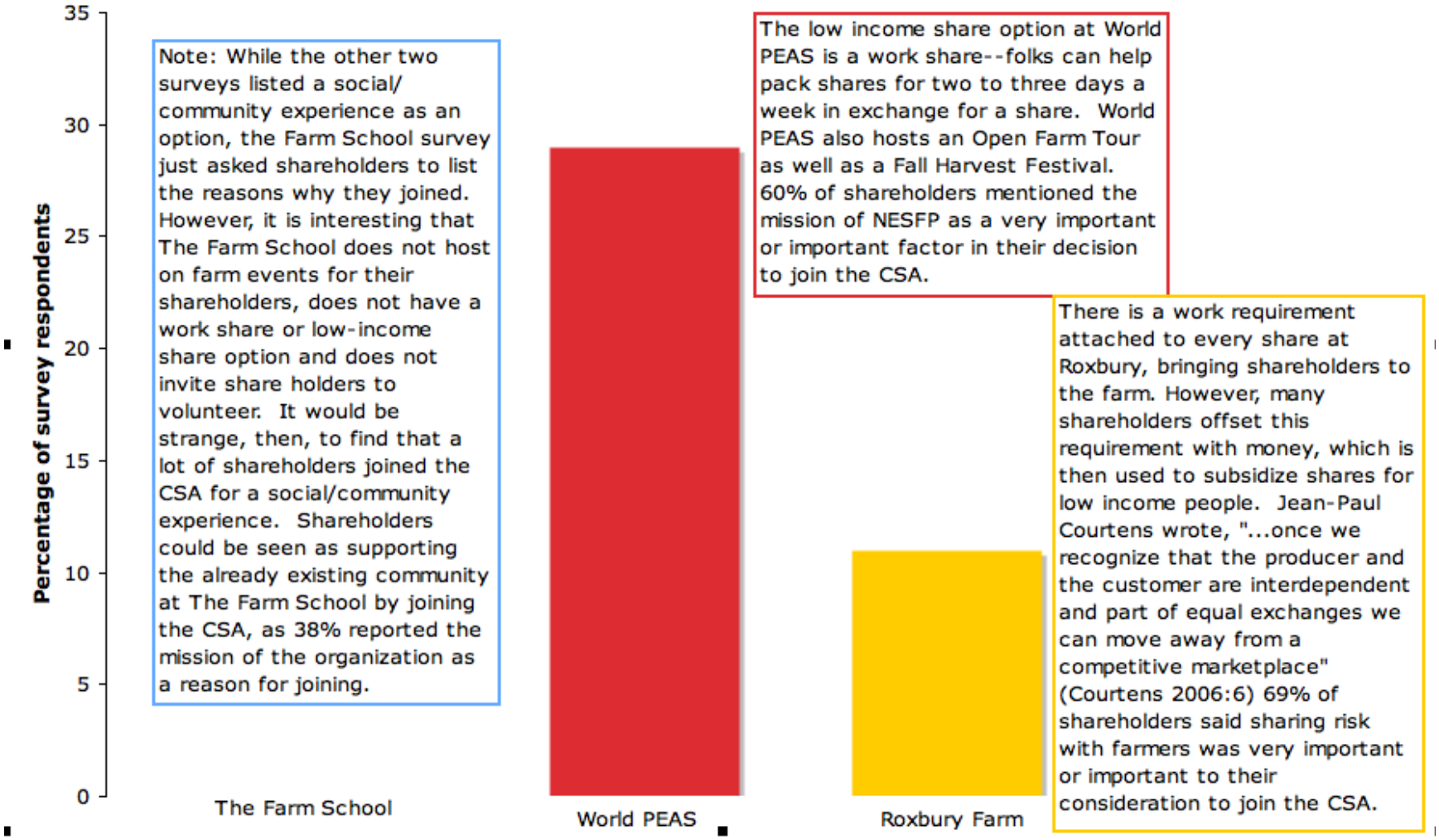
Note: Adult student farmers pay $25,000 to participate in The Farm School's year long program. The Practical Farm Training Program has four salaried employees including a director, educator, head grower, and a student farmer from the previous year's program. The Farm School was not as open about farm finances as was Roxbury, and I did not ask how much each employee is paid.

There are over 17 World PEAS farmers and for most farming is not their primary job. Many are nurses. All farmers are graduates from the farm business planning course offered by NESFP. Farmers can decide how much money they want to make from World PEAS by choosing the number and variety of crops they want to grow for the CSA. Before the start of the season, farmers bid on crops and indicate the number of times they will distribute those crops throughout the season. Farmer income from the CSA is on the rise. Farmers also sell to farmers markets, at churches, to restaurants, etc. Average income data from NESFP surveys.

This is the average income of the two main farmers Jean-Paul and Jody. They work 70-80 hours a week and only do CSA. Their income has risen since the start of the CSA 20 years ago. Jean-Paul was educated in biodynamic agriculture, including the study of associative economy, at an agricultural school in the Netherlands.

A 2001 Survey found the average income of CSA farmers to be $33,541, with $15,000 the median (Lass et al. 2001).

Percentage of shareholders for whom the social or community experience of CSA was an important factor in their decision to join

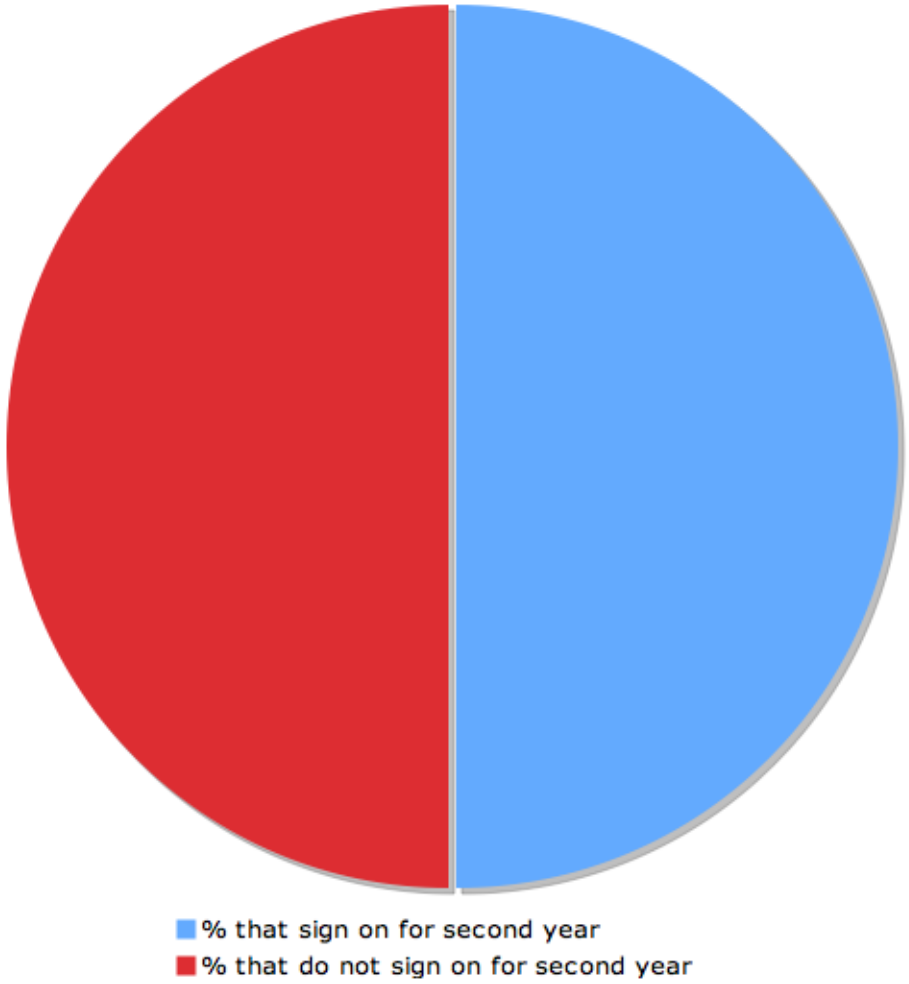


Note: While the other two surveys listed a social/ community experience as an option, the Farm School survey just asked shareholders to list the reasons why they joined. However, it is interesting that The Farm School does not host on farm events for their shareholders, does not have a work share or low-income share option and does not invite share holders to volunteer. It would be strange, then, to find that a lot of shareholders joined the CSA for a social/community experience. Shareholders could be seen as supporting the already existing community at The Farm School by joining the CSA, as 38% reported the mission of the organization as a reason for joining.

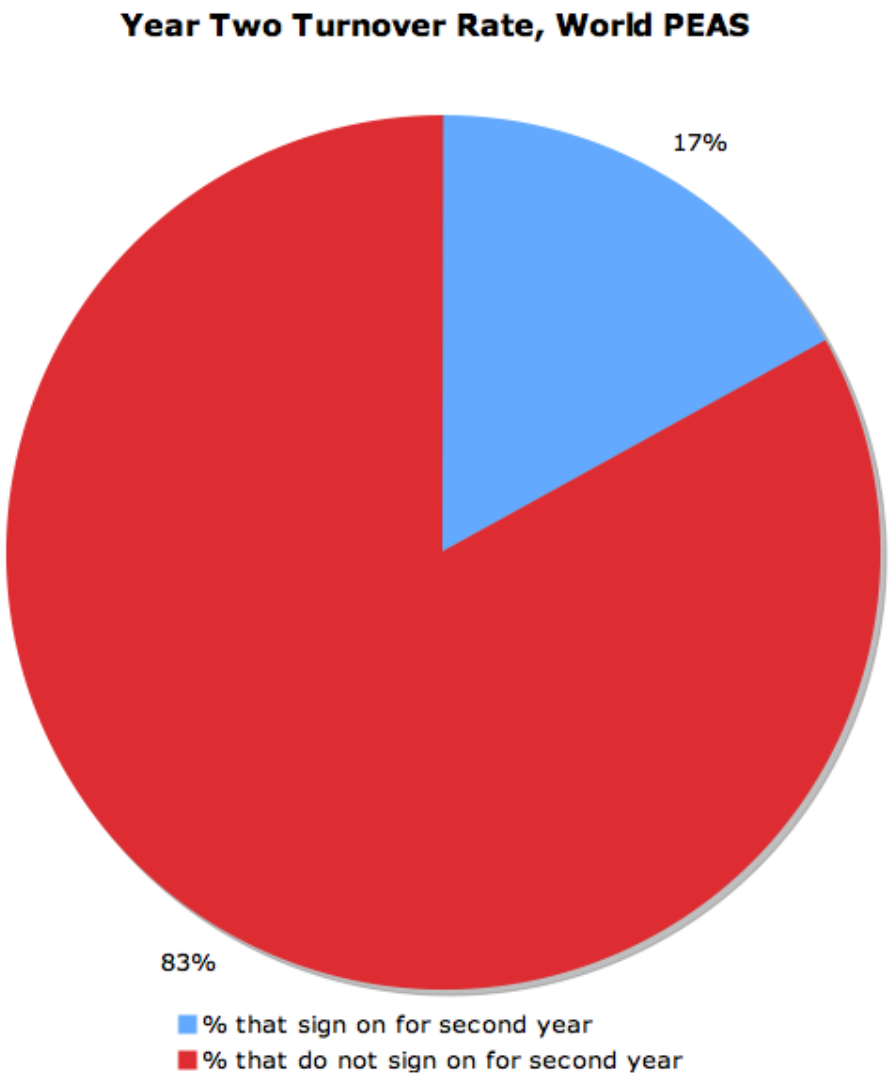
The low income share option at World PEAS is a work share--folks can help pack shares for two to three days a week in exchange for a share. World PEAS also hosts an Open Farm Tour as well as a Fall Harvest Festival. 60% of shareholders mentioned the mission of NESFP as a very important or important factor in their decision to join the CSA.

There is a work requirement attached to every share at Roxbury, bringing shareholders to the farm. However, many shareholders offset this requirement with money, which is then used to subsidize shares for low income people. Jean-Paul Courtens wrote, "...once we recognize that the producer and the customer are interdependent and part of equal exchanges we can move away from a competitive marketplace" (Courtens 2006:6) 69% of shareholders said sharing risk with farmers was very important or important to their consideration to join the CSA.

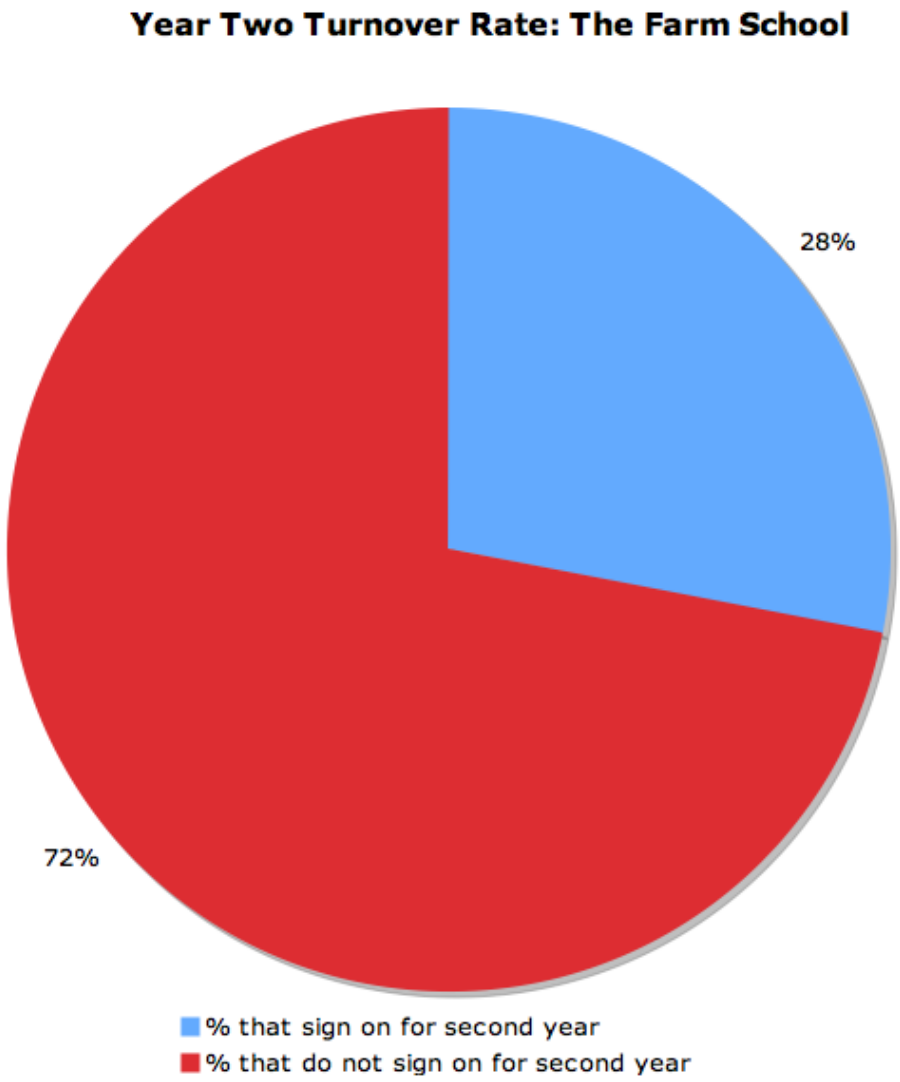
Year Two Turnover Rate, Roxbury Farm



"We know we have a member for life once the food has made a change in their body, it has affected their will. People will proclaim that the food has affected them healthwise, or it has opened them up to a new appreciation of food. This is a kind of commitment that is hard to find anywhere else in the marketplace." Farmer Jean-Paul Courtens, *Biodynamics and Roxbury Farm*



"Our retention rate is pretty low considering how many years we've been in existence. That being said, we're expanding at such break neck speeds that while we may be at our 4th year in Dracut we're at our first year in Bedford. So you have to go through all those people that like the local produce, but really need choice, or it turns out can't rely on the themselves to be somewhere during the hours of 3 and 5." Matthew Himmel, CSA Coordinator in an interview for *Who Supports CSA?* 7 June 2010



"...the model is that we have these coolers, and we drop off these boxes that are pre-washed and pre-packaged and you pick it up and there's a newsletter inside and you can read it if you want, about what's happening, but maybe you don't, and then you eat the vegetables and either you are happy with the product or you're not happy with it. I think in that model there is a lot more evaluation of the quality of what you are getting and the value of what you are getting for the price you are paying." Jennifer Core, Director of the Adult Farmer Training Program in an interview for *Who Supports CSA?* 15 July 2010

Works Cited

Aléx, Peder
1999 Swedish Consumer Cooperation as an Educational Endeavor *In* Consumers Against Capitalism?: Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840-1930. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 241-266.

Belasco, Warren James.
1993 [1989] Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Berry, Wendell
1996 [1995] Conserving Communities *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 76-84.

Berry, Wendell
2010 Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth. Berkeley: Counter Point.

Botsman, Rachel and Rogers, Roo
2010 What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption. New York: Harper Collins.

Budd, Christopher Houghton
1993 Rudolf Steiner Economist. Canterbury: Centre for Associative Economics.

Carson, Rachel
1962 Silent Spring. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cobb, John B. Jr.
1996 "Defining Normative Community". *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 185-194.

Cone, Cynthia A and Ann Kakaliouras
1995 "Community Supported Agriculture: Building Moral Community or Alternative Consumer Choice". Culture and Agriculture Vol 15. Issue 51-52: 38-31.

Courtens, Jean-Paul
2006 "Biodynamics and Roxbury Farm".

E.F. Schumacher Society
< http://www.smallisbeautiful.org/> Accessed 16 April 2011.

Ehrenfeld, David
1996 Pseudocommunitites *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 20-24.

Equity Trust, Inc.
<http://www.equitytrust.org/> Accessed 16 April 2011.

Furlough, Ellen, and Carl Strikwerda
1999 Consumers against Capitalism?: Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840-1990. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Greenhorns
<http://www.thegreenhorns.net/home.html> Accessed 16 April 2011.

Gregory, C. A.
1982 Gifts and Commodities. London: Academic.

Gurney, Peter
1996 Co-operative culture and the politics of consumption in England, 1870-1930. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press

Henderson, Elizabeth, and Robyn Van En
2007 [1999] Sharing the Harvest: a Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture. White River Junction: Chelsea Green.

Hurt, R Douglas
2002 American Agriculture: A Brief History. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press

Ingram, Helen and Mrill Ingram
2005 Creating Credible Edibles: the Organic Agriculture Movement and the Emergence of U.S. Federal Organic Standards *In* Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy, and Democracy. Ed. David S. Meyer and Valerie Jenness. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 121-48.

Joseph, Miranda
2002 Against the Romance of Community. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Karp, Robert
2008 “Toward an Associative Economy in the Sustainable Food and Farming Movement”. *Biodynamics* Spring 2008.

Kittredge, Jack
1996 Community-Supported Agriculture: Rediscovering Community *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 253-260.

Kopytoff, Igor
1986 “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”. *In* The

Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective. Ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 64-91.

Lamb, Gary
1994 Community Supported Agriculture: Can it be the Basis for an Associative Economy. Threefold Social Review (11): Margaret Fuller Corporation.

Lappé, Frances Moore
1991 [1971] Diet for a Small Planet. New York: Ballantine Books.

Lass, Daniel, Bevis, Ashley, Stevenson, G.W., Hendrickson, John and Kathy Ruhf
2001 Community Supported Agriculture Entering the 21st Century: Results From the 2001 National Survey. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Marx, Karl.
1930 [1867] The Buying and Selling of Labour-power *In* Capital. Volume 1. London : J.M. Dent & Sons, 319-29.

Marx, Karl.
1930 [1867] The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof *In* Capital. Volume 1. London : J.M. Dent & Sons, 319-29.

Mauss, Marcel.
1990 The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. London: W. W. Norton.

McFadden, Steve
2004 "History of Community Supported Agriculture, Part II." Rodale Institute. 08 Dec. 2010. <http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0204/csa2/part2.shtml>. Accessed 16 April 2011.

Polanyi, Karl.
1944 The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time. Boston: Beacon Press.

Polimeni, John M., Polimeni, Raluca Iorgulescu, Shirey, Richard, Trees, Christina and W. Scott Trees
2006 The Demand for Community Supported Agriculture. Journal of Business and Economics Research 4(2): 49-60.

Pollan, Michael
2006 The Omnivore's Dilemma. New York: Penguin Group.

Pollan, Michael
2010 "The Food Movement, Rising." The New York Times Review of Books 10 June 2010. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/jun/10/food-

movement-rising/> Accessed 16 April 2011.

Ross, Nancy J.
2005 How Civic is it? Success stories in locally focused agriculture in Maine. Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems 21(2): 114-123.x

Sahlins, Marshall David
1972 Stone Age Economics. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton.

Schumacher, E.F.
1973 Small is Beautiful. London: Blond & Briggs Ltd.

Selznick, Philip
1996 In Search of Community *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 195-203.

United States Department of Agriculture.
2009 [2007] Census of Agriculture. National Agricultural Statistics Service.. Vol. 1. 2009. Print. Geographic Area Ser.

Van En, Robyn
1988 Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture. South Egremont: Community Supported Agriculture of North America.

Vanderbeck, Melissa
2010 Living World. Unpublished paper. Experimental College, Tufts University.

Vandertuin, Jan.
1988 "Vegetables for All." *In* Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture Ed. Robyn Van En.. Egremont: CSANA Indian Line Farm.

Wilkins, Jennifer L.
2005 Eating right here: Moving from consumer to food citizen. Agriculture and Human Values 22: 269-273

Witt, Susan and Swann, Bob
1996 Land: The Challenge and the Opportunity *In* Rooted in the Land. Ed. William Vitek and Wes Jackson. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Witt, Susan
2000 “Group Effort Saves Nation’s First CSA Farm”. Creating Sustainable Enterprises and Communities. March/April 200? Issue.

Interviews Cited

Core, Jennifer
2010 Interview with Signe Porteshawver. 7 July 2010. Maggie’s Farm, Athol,

Massachusetts.

Courtens, Jean-Paul and Bolluyt, Jody
2010 Interview with Cathy Stanton. 24 March 2010. Roxbury Farm, Kinderhook, New York.

Holmes, Ben
2010 Interview with Signe Porteshawver. 7 July 2010. Sentinel Elm Farm, Athol, Massachusetts.

Schneider, Rachel
2010 Interview with Cathy Stanton. 25 March 2010. Hawthorne Valley Farm, Ghent, New York.

Shirey, Dick
2010 Interview by Signe Porteshawver, June 2, 2010, Roxbury Farm, Kinderhook, New York